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*Manuals of Religious Instruction
for Pupil Teachers.*

EDITED BY

JOHN PILKINGTON NORRIS, M.A.

CANON OF BRISTOL

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C. T. WINTER

FIFTH YEAR'S COURSE

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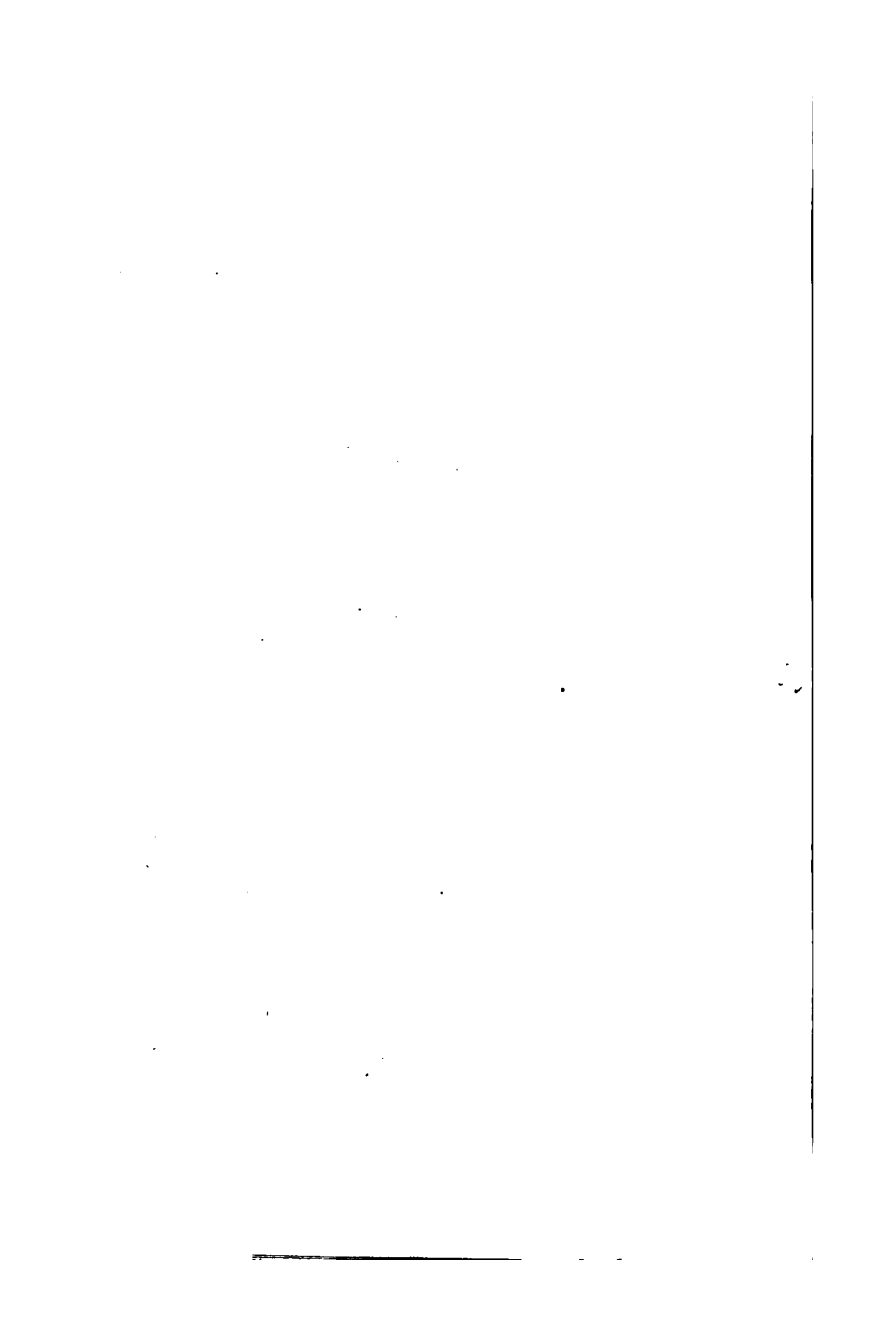
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LESSON I.

THE WORK OF CHRIST CONTINUED IN THE ACTS OF HIS APOSTLES, WHO DO EVERYTHING UNDER HIS GUIDANCE AND BY HIS POWER—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS—CHRIST'S LAST CHARGE TO HIS APOSTLES—HIS ASCENSION—THE UPPER ROOM—THE DAYS OF WAITING BETWEEN ASCENSION AND PENTECOST. (Ch. i.)

THE four Gospels contain, as we have seen, a selection of the words and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ; and these are followed in the New Testament by a fifth book, in which St. Luke,¹—who in his evangelistic history had written “concerning all things that Jesus *began* to do and to teach, until the day He was taken up,”—resumes his narrative from where it had been broken off, and further relates what our Lord *continued* to do after He had completed our redemption by His death and was ascended into Heaven.

In the Gospels we see the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of Man taking the form of a servant, and humbling Himself even to the death of the Cross; but in

¹ For the few facts of St. Luke's life which are known to us see pp. 5 and 6, Manual III.

the Acts of the Apostles He is revealed to us as "He that liveth and was dead," but Who is now "alive for evermore," and "hath the keys of hell and of death ;" and we must conceive of Him no longer as the Man of Sorrows, the patient, laborious, and often weary Teacher and Healer ; but as exalted to the right hand of Power, as He appeared to St. John in the Apocalypse ; His eyes as a flame of fire ; His feet like unto fine brass, glowing with the brightness of a furnace ; His voice as the sound of many waters ; His countenance as the sun shining in his strength.

The Apostles now see those "greater things" according to Christ's promise ; and by the Spirit He reveals to them those "many things" that they could not bear in the days of His flesh, and that it was impossible to communicate to them before the great Sacrifice had been accomplished, and their minds had been enlightened by the Holy Ghost.

And there, behind the veil, invisible to the eye of sense, but ever near and in the midst of His people, is the Lord Himself, beholding all, directing all, overruling all, "from first to last administering the affairs of His Kingdom with an energy of divine power far exceeding anything recorded in the four Gospels." He leads the way, and the Apostles follow, submitting themselves wholly to His guidance ; working miracles in His Name, and preaching to all redemption through His blood. And so His disciples increase day by day ; for though persecutions abound, the grace and help of Christ much more abound ; and the blood of His saints, far from extinguishing the light of the Gospel, causes it to burn only the more brightly.

That the Apostles do everything under Christ's guidance and by His power, that He works by them and in them, that He is continually with His Church, and will be so even to the end, is the great lesson to be borne in mind in studying this Book of the Acts.

After the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, we see it ever a visible body, (as indeed the Church had been under the Jewish dispensation,) called out, separated from the world, testifying of God, bearing witness to His truth, and intrusted with the ministration of His Word and ordinances—an organized society, whose officers,¹ institutions and laws are of Divine appointment; and this divinely instituted society is seen preserving to its members the means of grace, and sustaining Christianity through the darkest times, because Christ is with it according to His promise, and His Spirit works in it. (See Note 1.)

The Acts of the Apostles, the fifth and last of the historical books of the New Testament, is an inspired history of the foundation of the Church, and of its progress from that time until the standard of the Cross was planted by St. Paul in Rome, the great capital of the civilized world in the early days of Christianity.

While the Gospels treat of the Incarnate Son of God, the Holy Spirit is in the Acts specially revealed to us as a Divine Person of the Holy Trinity, "the promise of the Father" (i. 4), the great gift purchased by Christ and bestowed upon His people.

Consequently this book has been significantly called

¹ "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."—EPH. iv. 11, 12.

the Gospel of the Holy Ghost ; and after the Spirit's wonderful descent on the day of Pentecost, the Acts of the Apostles is a record of His holy influences. He speaks by the Prophets ; and by the power of the same Blessed Spirit the Apostles restore the dead to life, heal the sick, read the secrets of men's hearts, rule the Church, and reveal the deep things of God in inspired writings which are our standard of truth and doctrine. The nature, work, personality and Godhead of the Holy Ghost are thus made known to us (see v. 3, 4, viii. 29, x. 19, xiii. 2, xx. 28).

The history of the Church amongst the Jews and the ministry of St. Peter are related in the first twelve chapters. The second part, from the twelfth chapter to the end, is occupied with the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Jerusalem and Antioch are the two centres of apostolic work. To begin at Jerusalem, and first to preach the Gospel to the Jews, was Christ's command ; but to offer His salvation to "every creature" was no less so ; and this great missionary work was chiefly carried out by St. Paul, emphatically the Apostle of the Gentiles.

From the Acts we learn the principal events of the first thirty-three years of the Christian Church, and the wonderful power of the Cross of Christ ; which, preached by the Apostles under the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, gathered men of all nations and tongues, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, bond and free, and transformed them into a loving brotherhood, guided by "one and the self-same Spirit : one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body in Christ Jesus."

In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, St.

Luke records the last commands of our Lord, and tells us of His Ascension into Heaven; the joyful return of the Apostles to Jerusalem; of the days of prayer, waiting and expectation.

During "forty days" (and from this passage alone we learn the interval between the Resurrection and Ascension) Jesus had appeared from time to time to His disciples, and His object in this appears to have been threefold, namely: (1) To give full proof of His Resurrection to His witnesses, the Apostles; (2) to train them gradually to do without His bodily presence; (3) to trace the foundations of His Church, and the laws that were to regulate His Kingdom. And accordingly in His conversations we find commands or promises concerning the Christian Church—the "Kingdom" of which He spake during these forty days (Acts i. 3); missionary preaching—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature:" Christian baptism—"Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" Christian education—"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:" the Christian ministry—"As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you;" "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" "Feed My sheep;" "Feed My lambs:" the power of the Church to absolve and censure—"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Now, as He leads the Eleven out towards Bethany, He lays His last commands upon them, namely, that they should remain together at Jerusalem, and there wait for "the promise of the Father;" that is, for the

Holy Spirit, by Whom they should be baptized not many days hence. John the Baptist had indeed baptized with water unto repentance, but he had likewise prophesied of that "Mightier One" Who should baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke iii. 16). He had testified to the people of their sinfulness ; of their consequent need of cleansing ; and he had pointed them to "the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world." And so the baptism of John is now to be followed by that baptism of the Holy Ghost which he had foretold. John's baptism had fulfilled its object and passed away ; and now that Christ had "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," Christian baptism would visibly sign and seal the promises of forgiveness of sin and our adoption into the family of God.

With the Holy Ghost the Apostles would "receive power." They were now weak in faith, and understood but little of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. They were timid, and shrank from the great task before them. They would then be strong in faith, enlightened in understanding, courageous and skilful in making known the good news of salvation, and in witnessing to Christ, not only in Jerusalem and in Samaria, but unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Their longings after an earthly and visible kingdom led them still to desire it prematurely, and to ask their Lord whether at this time He would take the throne of His father David, restore the kingdom to Israel, and fulfil the clear and undoubted promises concerning the peace, prosperity, and glory of the chosen people under the rule of their Messiah ; but about the times and seasons, which God orders according to His in-

scrutable will, it was not our Lord's present purpose to inform them (vv. 6, 7). Then, not suddenly vanishing out of their sight, but gradually lifted up heavenwards, blessing them the while, with upraised hands (as St. Luke tells us in his Gospel), He slowly rose,—how high we know not, but clearly to some elevation above the earth, and there, in the secret pavilion of that bright cloud, He effected His mysterious translation into the unseen world. And while still gazing up into heaven, they heard a voice beside them recalling their thoughts to earth; and lo! angels bid them to wait, in patient expectation of their Lord's sure return in that same radiant cloud, with power and great glory, according to His own word. And still the Church waits; knowing that the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, and that He will so return at the time appointed by the Father, to take possession of the redeemed world as its lawful Lord and King.

The Apostles returned to Jerusalem with great joy; for their Lord was now enthroned in Majesty on high, and all power was given Him in heaven and on earth. Speedily too would He restore to them the Divine Presence in that Holy Comforter Whom He had promised.

In the upper room they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the holy women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus (mentioned here for the last time), and His brethren. They elected another Apostle to fill the place of the traitor Judas, turning as naturally for direction to their Lord as if He were visibly present with them; and it is *He*, they doubt not, Who (ordering all things) causes the lot to fall upon Matthias.

NOTES—LESSON I.

1. The Church has long lost her unity, and we see on the one hand churches, preserving the apostolic fellowship, but departing widely from apostolic doctrine; on the other hand, communities that maintain, for the most part, the great essentials of apostolic doctrine, but have separated themselves from apostolic fellowship.

Happily for us, the Church of England unites and maintains (as we believe) both these important characteristics of the primitive Church. It did not spring into existence at the Reformation, it made no new beginning; but, maintaining the apostolic organization and fellowship, it swept away abuses and corruptions; and, taking Holy Scripture as its rule of faith, it was guided by the Spirit of God into primitive purity of doctrine.

2. WORDS OR PASSAGES NEEDING EXPLANATION OR COMMENT:—

(a) "*Theophilus*" (ver. 1; Beloved of God). A Christian probably of rank or of official distinction, to whom St. Luke inscribed his Gospel and the Book of the Acts. He is supposed to have been a Gentile, but nothing is known about him.

(b) "*Taken up*" (ver. 2). That is, by God the Father, in Whose presence our Lord now appears as the Man Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and High Priest of His people.

(c) "*About an hundred and twenty*" (ver. 15). That is, the number of believers in Jerusalem; but there were others scattered about, especially in Galilee.

(d) "*Aceldama*" (ver. 19; Field of Blood). Called also the Potters' field, probably because clay for the use of the potter had been taken from it.

(e) "*To be a witness with us of His Resurrection*" (ver. 22). To have been a witness of Christ's Resurrection was one of the necessary qualifications of an Apostle.

LESSON II.

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER—THE FIRST CHRISTIAN
SERMON—CHRIST'S POWER AND PRESENCE WITH HIS
APOSTLES—PERSECUTION—STATE OF THE INFANT
CHURCH. (ii—iv.)

WE have already noticed the importance and deep significance of those divinely instituted Jewish Festivals (the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), when a whole nation, resting from labour, went up to Jerusalem to rejoice before the Lord and to worship Him.

At the first of these (see Manual II. pp. 53-56) we have seen the true Paschal Lamb offered up, and the type fulfilled in the Antitype.

This was at the last Passover before the Lord's Ascension. A sabbath of weeks (forty-nine days) from the Passover brings us to another sacred season; for the next day is the Feast of Pentecost (which means fiftieth)—a day henceforth far more memorable in the Church of Christ.

At the Passover redemption had been accomplished. At Pentecost a priceless gift, obtained through that redemption, was bestowed upon Christ's waiting and praying people. (See Note 1.)

The Apostles, and the other believers in Jesus, were in "*the*" upper chamber—the same probably in which

our Lord had instituted His Holy Supper, and in which He had appeared to His disciples (as they worshipped with fastened doors) after His Resurrection.

Again they prayed (as we may suppose) entreating Him to send them "the Promise of the Father," for which they were waiting at Jerusalem according to His own command; and lo! with "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind," the Holy Ghost descended and filled the hearts of the faithful with a peace that passeth all understanding; while the visible sign of the Divine Presence—the sacred flame that glowed around the bush out of which the Lord spoke to Moses, and burst from Sinai in devouring fire—rested harmlessly upon the head of each disciple. And the disciples spoke not only in their own but in other languages (see Note 2), "as the Spirit gave them utterance." When they went forth into the streets of Jerusalem, the whole multitude—the Jews of the Dispersion (see Note 3) and proselytes, who had come to the Holy City from all parts of the world to keep the feast—Parthians from the far East; Elamites (Persians); dwellers in Mesopotamia (the country between the great rivers Euphrates and Tigris, or "*in the midst of the rivers*," as the name implies); inhabitants of Asia Minor, from Libya or Africa and from other lands—were astonished to hear their several dialects from the lips of Galilæans: and they exclaimed in amazement, "What meaneth this?" while the home-bred Jews, to whom these utterances were but a Babel of words without meaning, scoffed at what they did not understand, saying, "These men are full of new wine" (ii. 13).

Then St. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, explained to the listening multitudes the meaning of what they saw and heard. Quoting from their own Scriptures (Joel ii. 28-32), and appealing to the early hour of the day—it was but nine o'clock in the morning—to show how unlikely it was that the excitement was due to intoxication, he told them that what they beheld was the fulfilment of prophecy; that God's Holy Spirit was now being poured out upon all flesh. It was likewise a sign of coming judgment; but there was a way of escape: for the prophet declared "that whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved." And who is that Lord? He Whom they have crucified! Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah and King of the Jews. This same Jesus hath God raised up according to the prophecy of David (Ps. xvi. 8-11, cx. 1), and of this His Apostles are witnesses, that He is both Lord and Christ.

The people scoffed no longer; but, appealing to Peter and the Eleven, cried out, in true contrition of heart, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And the answer was plain: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Believe God's promise, and He will save you.

Thus spoke Peter; and his words—sharper than a two-edged sword, for they were the words of the Spirit—pierced the hearts of his listeners, so that they gladly received them. By this first Christian sermon about three thousand souls were added to the infant Church, and baptized into a state of salvation (ii. 41).

Many signs and wonders were wrought by the

Apostles ; and one of these St. Luke has recorded at the commencement of his third chapter, to which we now turn.

The constant companionship of St. Peter and St. John betokens a friendship of a most affectionate nature. They laboured together, and (still holding to the national faith, while waiting for a fuller revelation of Christ's will) they worshipped at the House of God in company.

By the cure of the cripple in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth (see iii. 1-8) the people of Jerusalem were to know that Jesus, now risen and glorified, *was still continuing amongst them those mighty works* to which the rulers supposed they had for ever put a stop ; that Jesus, Who had been with them in humiliation, *was now with His Apostles, and with His Church, "in power and in glory and in the Holy Ghost."* And let us note this well, for it is the key to the right understanding of the whole history of the Apostolic Acts.

Here was a notable miracle done in the sight of all men ; and as the news of it circulated, many people came running together into Solomon's Porch, greatly wondering, and looking in amazement at St. Peter and St. John. So far the purpose of the miracle was answered ; the attention of the people was gained, and St. Peter hastened to make known to them the good tidings of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from sin, through the crucified, but risen and ascended, Saviour.

He prepared the way by leading them to repentance. He disclaimed all ability to work miracles by his own power or holiness. God is still glorifying (he said) His Son Jesus. *He it is*—He Whom ye denied in

the presence of Pilate and crucified—Who hath given the lame man this perfect soundness. Ye killed the Author of Life, and preferred one who had destroyed men's lives (Barabbas).

Then, seeing them conscience-stricken, he held out hope and administered consolation. "I wot that through ignorance ye did it." Nay more, they had but fulfilled what God had shown by the mouth of all His Prophets should be done. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, and your sins shall be blotted out." In Christ the prophecy of Moses (Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19) was being accomplished; let them take to themselves his word of warning and encouragement.

Meanwhile the stir and excitement, and the news of the miracle, arrested the attention of the rulers. "Who are these unauthorized teachers, who preach the Resurrection, and are drawing the people after them?" The Pharisees had been the bitterest foes of our Lord; but the Sadducees—the Rationalists of those days, the deniers of the Resurrection and of the future life—were now the most determined enemies of the Apostles; and they it was who (with the help of the Levite guards of the Temple and their captain¹) hastened to arrest the Apostles, that on the morrow they might be brought before the Sanhedrim. But such had already been the effect of St. Peter's inspired preaching, that about five thousand believers were added to the Church.

The next morning, St. Peter and St. John were brought before a full meeting of the Sanhedrim, of which Annas and Caiaphas were leading members; and

¹ It was their duty to preserve order and decorum in and near the Temple.

the question put to the two Apostles was: "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" St. Peter confessed that he had wrought the miracle by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom they had condemned; and by this very condemnation he proved from their own sacred writings that Jesus was the Christ: for was it not written, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner"?

The rulers had doubtless hoped to convict the Apostles of a capital offence; for it was ordained by the law of Moses, that if a prophet or a doer of miracles should arise and seek to draw away the people after other gods "that prophet shall be put to death" (Deut. xiii. 1-5).

Clearly, then, if Jesus were not God, the Apostles were guilty of this offence; for they preached Jesus, and boldly confessed to working miracles in His Name.

Still the rulers hesitated. The boldness of the Apostles, the greatness of the miracle, which they could not deny, the excitement of the people (who would probably rescue from any extreme measures the men whose words and deeds had made so deep an impression upon them), convinced the judges that caution was necessary; so for the present, they merely threatened Peter and John, forbidding them to speak any more in the Name of Jesus.

But Peter, who had trembled at the question of a maid-servant in the high priest's palace, and John, whose courage had failed in the Garden of Gethsemane, now stood erect and dauntless before the assembled Sanhedrim; for the Apostles had received the baptism of the Spirit,—the Spirit was in them and spake by

them : and Jesus, though unseen, Himself directed their every action, and was always present with them.

This, and this only, was the secret of the Apostles' courage, as they made known their determination to declare the truth—to obey God rather than men—to speak of the things that they had seen and heard (iv. 19, 20).

Then, once more at liberty, the Apostles and the whole Church lifted up their voices to God, to grant them boldness in speaking the Word, and power still to work miracles in the Name of Jesus ; and the Lord vouchsafed them a sign (iv. 31), and filled them with the Holy Ghost.

The one hundred and twenty believers had now become a "multitude," of one heart and of one soul, in which there were neither rich nor poor ; for Christian love suffered none to lack, nor would any say that the things which he possessed were his own (ver. 32).

NOTES—LESSON II.

1. "*The Feast of Pentecost*" (called also "the Feast of Weeks," "the Feast of the First Fruits"). Why our Lord, as the true Paschal Lamb, should have been offered up at the Feast of the Passover is abundantly clear ; but is there any reason why Pentecost should have been chosen for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church ?

It is believed that the Law was delivered to Moses at Sinai on the fiftieth day after the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and both Jewish writers and Christian Fathers believed that God designed Pentecost to be an annual celebration of the giving of the Law—the Old Covenant, written on tables of stone ; and if so, there is a peculiar and especial

reason why the Pentecostal Festival was selected for the giving of the New Covenant, written by the Spirit on the fleshly tables of the heart (see Jer. xxxi. 31-34, and Heb. viii.)—for that great spiritual harvest of which we read in the second chapter of the Acts.

2. "*Not only in their own, but in other languages.*" Our Lord had declared that certain signs should follow faith in Him; and that believers should "speak with new tongues" (Mark xvi. 17), as a pledge of a new life and power bestowed upon them; but the gift of tongues, by which supernatural wisdom was communicated to the Church, appears to have been intended rather for a sign and wonder than for the propagation of the Gospel. It did not confer a permanent knowledge of foreign languages; and Greek being generally understood, not only by the educated classes but also by the people throughout the Roman Empire, that language was sufficient for the purpose. See 1 Cor. xiv. 22.

3. "*The Jews of the Dispersion.*" Millions of Jews were at this time scattered over the civilized world. In Alexandria, in Libya and Ethiopia, in the Greek cities of Asia Minor, in those of Italy and Greece, Jewish traders had settled in large numbers, and Jewish synagogues were established for their worship.

LESSON III.

STATE OF THE INFANT CHURCH—PERSECUTION—FIRST
ACT OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION—THE FIRST MARTYR.
(v—viii.)

IN the fourth chapter of the Acts (vv. 32-37) we see the infant Church as a holy brotherhood, whose lives and actions are no longer governed by the motives and aims that are so powerful with men of the world; the rich among them no longer regard their possessions as their own, but rather as a trust for the benefit of every member of Christ's Body. (See Note 1.) And in this same chapter we have the earliest hymn of Christian praise of which there is any record (iv. 24-30).

But side by side with the wheat the tares spring up and the net let down into the sea gathers fish of every kind, both good and bad.

Of this a very memorable instance occurs at the beginning of the fifth chapter of St. Luke's history of the Church in Apostolic times.

One who acted in the true spirit of generous self-sacrifice was Barnabas, a native of Cyprus (iv. 36, 37). His zeal and piety stand out in striking contrast to the duplicity of another disciple, of whom—beyond the single act here related, and its result (v. 1-6)—we know nothing.

Ananias not only sought the applause of men upon

false grounds, pretending to a self-sacrifice he could not make, and simulating a devotion he did not feel ; but by his acted lie he thought to deceive the Holy One Who dwelt in the Church, and Whose gifts and influences were so marvellously and abundantly manifested in the sight of all. He lied not unto men but unto God.

Whether, in Peter's question to Sapphira (ver. 8), the words "for so much" mean the sum that Ananias had brought to the Apostles, or mean the sum actually paid for the land, is not quite clear from the narrative. In the former case, Sapphira added a falsehood to her fraud ; in the latter, she confessed the deception.

By the swift judgment that followed the infant Church was both cleansed and warned. Hypocrites feared to join it, while multitudes of genuine believers enlisted under Christ's banner (vv. 13, 14).

And the signs of an Apostle were exhibited by St. Peter in a degree hitherto unknown ; insomuch that his very shadow, falling upon the sick, became the means of cure (ver. 15).

Blessing and suffering, however, still went hand in hand. The Sadducees, with the high priest at their head, once more laid hands on the Apostles ; whose miraculous deliverance, adding to the confusion of the rulers, induced them to listen to the moderate counsels of Gamaliel.

The internal peace of the Church was now again disturbed by a new trouble.

A rivalry and jealousy had long existed between the Hebrews (or Jews of Palestine) and the Grecians, or foreign Jews (see Note 2) ; and even within the Church this feeling showed itself, and gave rise to the first act

of Church organization of which we have any account (see vi. 1-6).

To meet the emergency seven officers were chosen by the whole Church—"the multitude of disciples," and ordained by the Apostles. Their principal duty was to administer the charities of the Church. These men had all Greek names, and were probably Grecians or Hellenists; and that Stephen was a Hellenist is beyond a doubt. It was to the Hellenists he addressed himself more particularly; while his teaching (bearing the stamp of his Hellenistic education) was remarkable for its far-seeing discernment of the Church's future—its missionary influence and catholicity in the future, when Jerusalem would be no longer the Holy City, nor the Temple the one House of God, nor the Jews alone the chosen people of God.¹

To them such a doctrine was hateful to the last degree, and so Stephen was arraigned before the Sanhedrim (vv. 11-15.)

Stephen founded his defence upon the past doings of the Jewish people; and, under the veil of narrative, he established three points:—

(1.) That God vouchsafed His presence and grace to the saints of old in other countries besides the Holy Land, and long before the Temple was built.

(2.) Their fathers had again and again rejected God's messengers. They had rejected Joseph and Moses, and indeed all the prophets. Let them beware; for even now they were doing the same thing.

¹ "It was given to St. Stephen to catch the first glimpse of that new land of promise which was reserved for the Church upon earth. The Jews might reject the Messiah, and Jerusalem might become a heap of ruins; the Church, he foresaw, would survive her rejection by the chosen people and the ruin of the very Temple itself."—SHIRLEY'S *Apostolic Age*.

(3.) How that Jesus Whom he preached was the Messiah promised by Moses, the Messiah Whose unseen presence was with them in the wilderness. Of Him they had been the betrayers and murderers ! “ Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : *as your fathers did, so do ye !* ”

Thus, in a few brief but terrible sentences, did he sum up the whole matter, and condense the history of the privileged but stubborn race from the days of Moses to the hour at which he spoke. (See Note 3.)

No wonder they were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth ; and when he pointed to the opened heavens and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, their rage passed all bounds. Rushing tumultuously upon him, and dragging him through the streets to the place of execution outside the city wall, they stoned this first Christian Martyr, while he was praying for his murderers and calling upon the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit.

Nor did Stephen's execution satisfy the hostility that his teaching had aroused ; for rulers and people and rival sects vied with each other in persecuting all who, like him, were disciples of that “ Son of Man ”—that Crucified One Whom Stephen had seen “ standing at the right hand of God.”

Hitherto, for some six or seven years from its foundation, the sphere of the Church had been limited to Jerusalem and the immediate neighbourhood. Though its increase had been wonderful, it was still local and Jewish ; whereas Christ meant it to be catholic—the Church of every people and country ; and nothing, perhaps, showed His unseen hand, and His personal

though invisible guidance, more clearly than the manner in which her diffusion was brought about.

To escape the persecution that followed Stephen's death—the Sauline persecution as it is sometimes called,—the many thousand disciples, whose headquarters had hitherto been in Jerusalem, now fled from it and were scattered like seed cast from the hand of the sower ; some taking refuge in the remoter parts of Judæa, others in Samaria, Phœnicia, or in the island of Cyprus. The consequences of this great movement will be considered in the next Lesson.

NOTES—LESSON III.

1. In the large-hearted and bountiful charity of the first disciples we see the fulfilment of Christ's precept to His followers. Love was substituted for selfishness. They were endeared to one another by the holiest associations ; and much of their time was passed together in an almost continual act of wondering adoration.

But, though in the case of disciples living together there was community in the daily use of each others' means, and "all things were to them common," their charity was voluntary. There was no compulsion and no communism as we understand it. This is proved by the words of St. Peter to Ananias (v. 4), and by the fact that almsgiving was liberally carried out.

2. "*The Grecians, or foreign Jews.*" The designations '*Hebrews*,' '*Grecians*,' and '*Greeks*' that occur in our English version of the New Testament bear severally the following meanings :—

Hebrews (or home-Jews) were the Jews of Palestine, who spoke *Aramaic*, a dialect of Hebrew and the popular language

of the Holy Land in our Lord's time and in the days of the Apostles. To these the Twelve more particularly addressed themselves.

The *Grecians* were, on the contrary, Jews born or bred in foreign lands, Jews of the Dispersion, who spoke Greek, and are called *Hellenists* in the Greek Testament.

The *Greeks* were either natives of Greece or Gentiles merely, who spoke the Greek language.

The Hebrews were more bigoted than the Grecians or Hellenists, and prided themselves on their intense nationalism. Hence a jealousy and rivalry naturally sprang up between them, and soon manifested itself even amongst those who had embraced Christianity (vi. 1).

3. In St. Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrim, his historical allusions do not, in some few instances, agree with the Hebrew Scriptures.

Joseph, and not Jacob, was buried in Sychem. Jacob's resting-place was the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron. It was Jacob, and not Abraham, who bought ground of Hamor at Sychem; and Abraham (according to Genesis xi. 26, xii. 4, and xi. 32) left Haran before, and not after the death of his father.

This, however, does not affect Stephen's arguments, which bear the stamp of Divine inspiration. It only shows that when the Holy Spirit inspires men He leaves them, it may be, to their own judgment or memory in minor matters. The man is fallible in things indifferent; in all matters of *religious* import he is insured from error.

4. "*Charran*" (xii. 2, 4), or Haran. Cp. Gen. xi. 31, 32, xii. 4.

LESSON IV.

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM—PHILIP'S
WORK IN SAMARIA—THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH—CON-
VERSION OF SAUL—SAUL IN DAMASCUS, ARABIA AND
JERUSALEM. (viii. ix. 30.)

IN the scheme of Divine Providence the wrath of man is ever working out the purposes of God. In the lives of the patriarchs, in the history of the chosen people, in our Lord's life on earth, and in the records of His Church, we may trace the same mysterious law underlying all, and controlling all, and making it evident to those who desire to understand, that though the people rage, and the kings imagine a vain thing, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed, still it is *He* Who reigneth over all, bringing good continually out of the seeming evil, and making the devices of His enemies work together for the furtherance of His designs.

It was so with the Church at Jerusalem. The Apostles, touched with the fire of the Divine Spirit, were mighty both in word and deed. The little flock of timidly following disciples became a great company, to whom multitudes were daily added; while the presence of the Spirit was manifested in many miraculous gifts, and above all by the fervent love and ardent piety and holy lives of all who believed the good news of the Gospel.

But wonderful as the progress of the Church had been, it was as yet a local rather than a world-wide institution. It wanted diffusion to become catholic. The Church of Jerusalem must become the Church of all nations; the Gospel must be preached to every creature; the seed heaped together in one place must be sown broadcast, and scattered far and wide, even to the ends of the earth.

Persecution, cruel and relentless, followed upon the martyrdom of Stephen; for his doctrines and the teaching of the Christians generally had been condemned by the rulers as destructive of the religion and institutions of the Jews, and thus Christ's prediction of suffering (John xvi. 2) was speedily fulfilled.

The foremost persecutor in Jerusalem was Saul of Tarsus; who, seeking out all who belonged to the hated sect, committed them to prison, and even took away their lives. But the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church; for the disciples, who fled from the Holy City, carried the light of Christ's doctrine with them, and held it forth to many people and in many places; for we read that "they who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word" (viii. 4).

Philip, one of the Seven, took refuge in Samaria, and became the Evangelist of the Samaritans; for which office his Hellenistic training, and consequent freedom from many Jewish prejudices, helped to fit him. The Samaritans, like the Jews, were looking and longing for a Messiah; and in their trustfulness and desire for spiritual enlightenment they had given heed to a man who declared himself to be a visible appearance of the power of God, a personified attribute of the Almighty.

This was Simon of Gittum in Samaria (Simon Magus), one of those magicians or professors of occult arts, who ministered to the general longing for some kind of revelation (existing in the midst of the prevailing materialism), and almost assumed the rank of religious teachers. Simon, it is likely, sought to attest his pretensions by certain pseudo-miracles; and, attracted by the real ones performed by Philip in the power of the Spirit, he professed belief in his doctrines and received baptism, probably supposing it would confer some miraculous gift that would be useful and profitable (vv. 9-13).

When the Apostles, who still tarried at Jerusalem, heard that the Samaritans were receiving the Gospel, and being baptized into the Church, they hastened to take such measures as seemed expedient. If the Samaritans were indeed genuine disciples, they must be recognized by the Apostles, lest a schismatic Christianity should succeed to the schismatic Judaism that had preceded it; but if the work, on the other hand, should prove to be unreal and delusive, all countenance must be withdrawn from it.

The Apostles St. Peter and St. John, who were sent from the Apostolic College in Jerusalem to Samaria, recognized the Samaritan disciples by praying that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which, when bestowed through laying on of apostolic hands, was accompanied, it would seem, by some outward and visible manifestation. And in this case also our Lord set His seal to the Apostolic blessing; for Simon witnessed the miraculous manifestations, and marvelled at them (vv. 14-17).

His blasphemous offer (ver. 18)—such an offer as

might be made by one magician to another—showed that the heart of the sorcerer still lurked beneath the outward semblance of the Christian; and, though Peter's stern rebuke terrified him for a moment, his subsequent life showed that neither first nor last was his repentance real or his faith sincere. (See Note 1.)

We next see Philip, the great Evangelist of the Samaritans, preaching the glad tidings to a diligent seeker after truth: the Ethiopian eunuch. (See Note 2.) The heart of this great officer of the court of Queen Candace was as guileless as Simon's was full of all subtlety, and the result of Philip's teaching upon the two men was as different (vv. 26-39).

Thus (unless the eunuch, instead of being a Gentile proselyte, was, as some suppose, an Ethiopian Jew) another step was taken towards admitting Gentiles into Christ's spiritual Kingdom.

At Azotus (the Old Testament Ashdod), twenty miles from Gaza, Philip continued his work, preaching in every town until he came to Cæsarea, the Roman capital of Judæa, on the shores of the Mediterranean; and only once again (xxi. 8), after the lapse of nineteen or twenty years, is he mentioned in St. Luke's narrative.

The narrative now takes us back to Jerusalem and to the doings of Saul of Tarsus (ix.).

In the city of Tarsus—ranking in culture with Athens and Alexandria, the seat of a Greek university, the capital of a province (Cilicia), Roman by conquest but Greek by settlement and civilization—Saul was born, and here he passed the first years of his life. He might therefore be called a Hellenist; but both his parents being of pure Jewish extraction, he was

(as he ever claimed to be) "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." And if a Hebrew by descent he was doubly so by education and bent of mind. Hebrew was the language of his home ; and in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel, the most famous Rabbi of the times, he had imbibed the intense patriotism that burst forth when Stephen's preaching, and the progress of Christianity, aroused his hatred against the detested sect of the Nazarenes.

It was with these feelings that he became, as we have seen, the chief persecutor of the Christians in Jerusalem ; and, in the expressive words of St. Luke's narrative, he was still "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," when, armed with letters from the high priest (see Note 3), he set out for the ancient city of Damascus in Syria ; there to hunt out the followers of Jesus and bring them bound to Jerusalem (ix. 1, 2).

North through Samaria, past the Sea of Galilee, along the stony hills and plains and barren uplands which lie along the base of Anti-libanus, Saul and his company journey, until, on the fifth or sixth day, they draw near to Damascus. On the left is the towering snow-crowned Hermon, that "tower of Lebanon which looketh towards Damascus ;" far around stretches a dreary plain, skirted by bare hills, in the midst of which the ancient and beautiful city rests on an island of verdure, over which the streams of Lebanon pour their fertilizing and refreshing waters.

It is mid-day ; the fiery Syrian sun is blazing in all its intensity, and pouring down a flood of light on plain and valley and mountain. Suddenly a light, that causes that sun to wane like a taper in the glare of

daylight, flashes upon the travellers, striking them to the earth ; and out of that insufferable glory the ardent leader hears a clear articulate Voice speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, in words of terrible expostulation ; and, looking up, Saul sees in the midst of that glory the visible Presence of Jesus Christ.

Trembling and astonished, he inquires, " Who art Thou, Lord?" and the answer, clear and unmistakeable, is this : " I am JESUS, Whom thou persecutest." Yes, that Jesus, against Whom you are fighting with all the energy of your nature, is none other than the Messiah, the Son of God. (See Note 4.)

Saul at last rises from the earth humbled, subdued, converted ; to be henceforth the disciple, the servant, the Apostle of Christ (vv. 3-8).

The fasting and the prayers of the conscience-stricken slayer of God's people—the mission of Ananias, which included Saul's baptism and the restoration of his sight, and how he boldly preached the faith which once he destroyed, must all be studied in the sacred pages of St. Luke's narrative (see ix. 10-22).

In Arabia (which country now became his retreat) Saul continued many days in solitary communion with his Lord, receiving from Him alone the Gospel of His grace ; and then returning to Damascus, probably about three years after his conversion (Gal. i. 12-18), he again did his utmost to win his countrymen to Christ ; showing them from their own scriptures how He was the Messiah, the Anointed One, of Whom their prophets had written ; but they believed him not, and sought only to kill him (vv. 20-24).

Escaping to Jerusalem (ver. 24), even the Apostles were unable to believe in the sincerity of his proffered

friendship, until Barnabas brought him to them, and told them the wonderful story of his conversion.

But the unbelieving Jews would not listen to his message of salvation, and, like the Jews of Damascus, sought his life. Then Jesus warned him to fly from Jerusalem (xxii. 17-21); for, though a chosen instrument for his Master's service, his mission is not to be in his own land nor amongst his own people, and in Jerusalem he could no longer remain in safety. The disciples conducted him to Cæsarea, that from thence he might take ship for Tarsus, the place of his birth; and here we lose sight of him for a season (vv. 26-30).

NOTES—LESSON IV.

1. *Simon Magus* subsequently grafted a kind of spurious Christianity upon his own system of Eastern philosophy, and is said to have become the originator of the Gnostic heresy, which introduced the pseudo-philosophic or rationalizing element into the Church. The term *simony*, which is used to denote the 'sale or purchase of spiritual functions, is derived from this man's name.

2. "*The Ethiopian eunuch*." Probably not a eunuch in the literal meaning of the term, but a great officer. He was already a proselyte (ver. 27).

"*Ethiopia*" is here used in its more restricted sense, and refers to the kingdom of Meröe on the Upper Nile.

"*Candace*" (ver. 27) is the name of a dynasty, and not of an individual Queen.

3. "*Letters from the high priest*." The high priest and Sanhedrim at Jerusalem were empowered, by decrees from Julius Cæsar and Augustus, to exercise jurisdiction over Jews who had taken up their abode in foreign cities.

4. Besides St. Luke's account of St. Paul's conversion, the Acts contain two versions of the same event by the Apostle himself (see xxii. 6, 11, and xxvi. 12-18), and from them we learn a few additional particulars.

5. PASSAGES OR WORDS THAT NEED EXPLANATION :—

(a) "*Death*" (viii. 1). More literally murder.

(b) "*Haling*" (ver. 3). An old English form of hauling or dragging with violence.

(c) "*The city of Samaria*" (ver. 5). This should be a city. The particular town is not specified. The chief city of Samaria at this time was Sebaste.

(d) "*Then laid they*" (i.e. the Apostles) "*their hands on them*" (ver. 17). This passage (together with xix. 6 and Heb. vi. 2) is the Church's warrant for Episcopal confirmation. The act may not be precisely the same, but it is a following of apostolic example.

(e) "*In His humiliation,*" etc. (ver. 33). This passage may mean—"In His state of humiliation, while He was in the world, His judicial power was taken away; He appeared not as the Divine Judge of men. Nevertheless, His origin is divine, no man can expound it; for His life is removed from the earth, it is unearthly both in its beginning and its end."—HUMPHREY'S *Acts of the Apostles*.

LESSON V.

CORNELIUS THE CENTURION AND THE APOSTLE ST. PETER
—THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH—PERSECUTION OF THE
CHURCH BY HEROD AGRIPPA—MARTYRDOM OF ST.
JAMES—DELIVERANCE OF ST. PETER—ANGER OF THE
BAFFLED PERSECUTOR—HIS DEATH. (x—xii.)

A VERY notable crisis—"the greatest epoch in the early history of the Church"¹—is related in the tenth chapter of St. Luke's narrative.

Was Christ's Church to be a Jewish sect, guarded with all the jealousy that fenced round the admission of Gentiles into the Jewish Church? or were its doors to be thrown wide open, not only to Hellenists and Samaritans and proselytes, but to Gentiles of every kind and degree: not only to the circumcised but to the uncircumcised?

In the former case (for full admission to Church membership) a previous conversion to the Jewish faith, circumcision, and a diligent observance of the whole Mosaic law and ritual, would be necessary.

This double conversion—first to Judaism and then to Christianity—this strange division of allegiance between Christ and Moses, was however never intended by our Lord, and such a Gospel would never have brought the Gentiles under His banner. The message with which the Apostles were charged was to all nations and to every creature.

Yet this perfect liberty of Christ's spiritual subjects

¹ Shirley, *Apostolic Age*.

—that “in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision”—was the hardest lesson that the Apostles had to learn. They were indeed Christians ; but they were also Jews and strict observers of the law ; and though they had received into the Church Samaritans and proselytes, they would have shrunk back from admitting the uncircumcised as from an impious and sacrilegious act ; and so their unseen Lord, Who had decreed this very thing, made His will known to them by a special revelation.

At Cæsarea there dwelt at this time a Roman military officer named Cornelius.¹ A seeker after God, he prayed continually, and his prayers were answered by the command to send for the Apostle Peter, from whom he would receive a further revelation of God’s will ; while St. Peter, at Joppa, was prepared for his visit to the Roman centurion by the vision in which he saw a representation of the Catholic Church, and was made to understand that all distinctions of race were for ever abolished between those who believe in Christ and are cleansed by Him. So, in a little while, we behold the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile completely broken down, and St. Peter preaching Christ to the listening Gentiles ; for the Spirit had told him to go to them, “doubting nothing.”

And even while he was yet speaking to Cornelius and his household, the rushing sound and visible tokens of the Holy Ghost’s descent upon these believing but un-

¹ A centurion of the Italian band, a cohort levied in Italy, but not the bodyguard of the Roman Procurator ; for at this time the Jews had once more a king of their own—Herod Agrippa, who, having received the tetrarchies of his uncles Antipas and Philip from Caligula, and Judæa from Claudius (A.D. 41), now reigned over all the dominions of his grandfather.

circumcised Gentiles, constrained the Apostle to exclaim, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Shall the outward sign be refused to those to whom God has already given the inward grace? (x. 1, 47.)

But the Apostles and brethren at Jerusalem heard of St. Peter's mission with surprise and anxiety, while the stricter Jewish Christians "contended with him."

When, however, they knew that he had but obeyed the express command of Christ, they heartily accepted this new revelation of His will (see xi. 18).

Hitherto Jerusalem had been the chief centre of apostolic working; St. Peter taking the lead, and Jews forming the bulk of the Church. But now, at the famous Syrian town of Antioch (see Note 1), where the disciples first received the glorious name of Christians, another Church, planted by the Hellenist Evangelists, rose into importance, and became the great centre of the apostolic missions. It was composed chiefly of Gentile Christians; for the Evangelists preached Christ to the Greeks,¹ and a great number of them not only believed, "but turned unto the Lord" (vv. 20, 21).

Here again was a matter for apostolic investigation. Cornelius and his friends had indeed been received into the Church by special revelation of the Lord; but were her doors to be opened indiscriminately to the whole Gentile world? The work going on at Antioch must be tested, as in the case of the Samaritans; and Barnabas was deputed by the Apostles at Jerusalem to inquire into it. When he came, and had seen the grace

¹ Greeks, and not Grecians, being thought by most critics to be the true reading in xi. 20.

of God, he was glad, and hastened to Tarsus, to seek Saul, with whom he returned to Antioch, and continued for a whole year teaching many people in that city.

Thus did Christ teach His Apostles by repeated revelations, by visions and outpourings of His Spirit, by His own guiding hand, the lesson that they were so slow to learn—that in His spiritual Kingdom circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but a new creature ; the new birth of the Spirit, whereby all men, without distinction, who believe in Him, are baptized into one body, and united to one Spiritual Head.

The first persecution that was directed against the Church had been overruled for its good. The conversion of the chief persecutor, the dispersion of the disciples, and the consequent unfurling of Christ's banner in other cities and amongst other people, were its results ; but the Apostles themselves tarried in Jerusalem, still clinging to the customs of their fathers, and still worshipping with them in that Holy Temple, which they regarded as emphatically the House of God. They needed to be taught that Christ's words were fulfilled which He had spoken to the woman of Samaria (see St. John iv. 23, 24). That they might learn this great lesson *the Apostles must themselves be scattered*; and God again made use of the enemies of His people to bring about His own high purposes.

The Herods—father, son and grandson—whose names have come down to us in connexion with our Lord and His Church, were all blood-stained tyrants. The first was the would-be murderer of the infant Christ and the slayer of the young children of Bethlehem. His son, Herod Antipas, imbrued his hands in

the blood of the Baptist; and in the narrative under our consideration a grandson, Herod Agrippa (the son of Aristobulus)—who now, by the favour of the Roman Emperor, included in his dominions Judæa and Samaria as well as the Tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias—becomes the first royal persecutor of the Church. He had obtained his dominion by the flattery of such rulers as Caligula and Claudius, and his policy was to secure it by making himself popular with the Jewish people. For this end he spared neither gifts nor blandishments, gratifying their love for the outward ceremonies of religion and their fanatical zeal against the supposed enemies of it. With this view it was that he killed St. James, the son of Zebedee, with the sword, and threw St. Peter into prison, that when the Passover was over he might further gratify the popular hatred of the Christians by putting that Apostle also to death.

But the fervent prayers of the Church prevailed. No human power could have saved him, and an angel was sent to bring him out of prison.

“Touched, he upstarts—his chains unbind—
Through darksome vault, up massy stair,
His dizzy, doubting footsteps wind
To freedom and cool moonlight air.”—KEBLE.

And soon he stands before the door of the house where prayers, more powerful than Herod and his soldiers, are even then going up for him from the assembled Church. And Peter's deliverance was speedily followed by a terrible judgment upon the persecuting king, when at the very height of his pride and arrogance.

In the theatre at Cæsarea, where he was celebrating games in honour of his patron the Emperor Claudius,

he made an oration to the people ; and as the rays of the rising sun lit up his robe of silver tissue with dazzling glory, his flatterers gave a shout, and exclaimed, " He is a god ! " He accepted their worship ; and " immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." (A.D. 44; xii. 20-23 ; and JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* xix. 8, 2.)

Thus the deliverance of Peter and the death of Herod are placed by St. Luke in striking contrast ; exemplifying as they do the words of the inspired poet : "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." " But he that seeketh after the soul of the righteous, him the angel of the Lord shall persecute, and destruction shall come upon him unawares " (Psa. xxxiv. 7, xxxv. 4-8). And the chapter (xii.) of which the principal incidents have been so stirring, closes with the solemn and triumphant words : " But the Word of God grew and multiplied " (ver. 24).

NOTES—LESSON V.

1. "*Antioch.*" The celebrated Syrian city of that name, the chosen residence of Grecian kings and Roman proconsuls, became early in the apostolic ages the Eastern headquarters of commerce, luxury, pleasure and superstition ; but with the founding of the Church in Antioch (A.D. 40) it became, as a new centre of apostolic action, the most important city, next to Jerusalem, in the early history of Christianity.

2. WORDS OR PASSAGES NEEDING EXPLANATION OR COMMENT :—

(a) "*The housetop*" (x. 9). That is, the flat roof which is generally a characteristic of Eastern houses,

(b) "*Knit at the four corners*" (ver. 11). "Meaning, probably, not tied together at the corners, but fastened to the ends of four ropes." --HUMPHRY.

(c) "*And in those days came prophets*" (xi. 27). In apostolic times the gift of prophecy was bestowed upon certain men for the benefit of the Church (see Acts ii. 17, 18, xix. 6, xxi. 8-11; Rom. xii. 6; 1 Cor. xii. 10, 28-29, xiii. 2, 8, xiv. 6, 29-37, etc.). There were then "some hundreds, it may be thousands, of men, as truly inspired as Isaiah or Jeremiah had been, as St. Peter and St. Paul were then, speaking words that were as truly, as any that were ever spoken, inspired words of God, and yet of most of them all record has vanished." The gift was sometimes predictive; but it included inspired preaching and a disclosing of the secrets of men's hearts, so that they fell down and worshipped God. (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25; Acts v. 4. See the article "Prophets of the New Testament," by Professor Plumptre, *Good Words*, March 1865.)

(d) "*Sent to the elders*" (ver. 30). The word *elders*, or *presbyters*, is here first mentioned. The office was derived from the Jewish polity into the Christian Church, and received Divine sanction (xx. 28).

LESSON VI.

SECOND PART OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES—ST. PAUL'S
APOSTOLIC MISSION—PAUL AND BARNABAS IN CYPRUS,
AT ANTIOCH, ICONIUM, LYSTRA, AND DERBE, IN
ASIA MINOR—ORGANIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF
THE CHURCHES—THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL—THE
DECREE OF THE COUNCIL RESTORES PEACE TO THE
CHURCH. (xiii—xv. 35.)

THE thirteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles begins what may be viewed as the second part of that book; and a very decided landmark is reached in the history of the early Church.

The Mother Church of Jerusalem fades out of sight, and the Hellenistic Church of Antioch rises into view, as the centre of those apostolic missions to the heathen which, by and by, make it the capital of Gentile Christendom. The history of the Hebrew Christian Church gives place to that of the Gentile Churches founded by the Apostle Paul.

A *Gentile* Christian Church (as the Church of Antioch is generally admitted to have been in the main), free from the trammels of Jewish prejudices, and not perplexed with questions touching the binding nature of the law and ordinances of the Mosaic dispensation, would be much more likely to originate missions to

the outlying heathen world than the Hebrew Church of Jerusalem ; for a free and unfettered Gospel—that larger Gospel which St. Paul was ready to preach, but which others, even amongst the Apostles, still hesitated to proclaim—was essential to their success.

Accordingly, we read that the Christians of the Church of Antioch commended this matter to God in solemn services ; and that, as they fasted and prayed, the Holy Ghost (speaking probably by one of their prophets) said : “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul” (mark them off from the rest) “for the work whereunto I have called them.” Then, having (by laying on of hands) been ordained to the high office of Apostles, to which the Holy Ghost had elected them, the two missionaries sailed from Seleucia¹ to Cyprus, taking with them John Mark (a kinsman of Barnabas) as their minister (xiii. 1-4).

Thus originated the Apostleship of the Gentiles. In the former selection of an Apostle we saw that the one essential qualification was that he should have been an eyewitness of the Resurrection (i. 21). This condition was fulfilled in Paul—“Am I not an Apostle? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. ix. 1.) Probably it was also fulfilled by Barnabas, for he too was called an Apostle (Acts xiv. 4), having been separated with Paul to the apostleship (xiii. 2).

After preaching in the synagogue of the Jews at Salamis (the eastern port of the island), the Apostles crossed to its capital city, Paphos, on its western side. Here Sergius Paulus, the Roman Proconsul or

¹ Seleucia “by the Sea” (so called to distinguish it from other cities of the same name) was the seaport and fortress of Antioch, and was distant from it, by land, fifteen miles.

Governor (see Note 1), a man of candid and inquiring mind, not despairing of truth with Pilate, but seeking for more light like Cornelius, invited them to make known to him the Word of God.

And the conversion of Sergius Paulus was the result ; for when the sorcerer Elymas withstood Paul, seeking to turn away the Governor from the faith, Saul denounced him as a child of the devil, and (exercising for the first time apparently his miraculous apostolic powers) he struck him blind for a season. So swift and sure a judgment convinced the Roman Governor that Saul (who henceforth is known by his Roman name of Paul) and Barnabas were indeed Apostles of the Most High God. Nor must we fail to note (what is so often observable in the history of God's Church and people) that an apparent hindrance was overruled for good—that he who set himself to oppose the truth was made an instrument in advancing it.

Cyprus, however, was not long to be the Apostles' resting-place. They must go forwards ; and, crossing over to the continent, they landed and went up to Perga. Here John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (see Note 2), but Paul and Barnabas pushed on over a high tableland—a wild, inhospitable and mountainous country—to Antioch in Pisidia.

At Perga, in the synagogue of the Jews, Paul preached his first Christian sermon of which we have any account (vv. 16-41). Comparing it with Stephen's address to the Sanhedrim, their resemblances seem to show how deep an impression that defence had made upon Paul's mind, although he stifled his convictions, and was only converted to faith in Christ by the revelation of Christ to him.

He told his countrymen that God's purpose in raising up David—that from his seed the Messiah should be born—had been fulfilled in Christ, to Whom the Baptist had pointed, and to Whom their own scriptures bore witness. The rulers of Jerusalem had rejected Him, because they knew not the scriptures; and yet these very scriptures they fulfilled in condemning Him. Such was his line of argument. Through faith in Christ he preached to them the forgiveness of sins, that forgiveness which could never be obtained by the law of Moses; and thus he sounded the first note of that doctrine of justification by faith in Christ which runs through his Epistles, and of which he was pre-eminently the exponent and champion. He set before his countrymen the alternative of either death in unforgiven sin or deliverance from it.

This sermon made a deep impression on both Jews and Gentiles; for, as they went out of the synagogue, they besought him that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.²

When that day arrived, the interest was so great that almost the whole city came to hear the proclamation of a Saviour; but the Jews—filled with envy that the Gentiles should be made equal to them, and should have an equal share with them in the redemption that the Apostles preached—contradicted and blasphemed; and finally, stirring up the proselytes, especially the women, raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, who, shaking off the dust of their feet for a testimony against them, went on over the rugged hills

² In the oldest copies the words are :—"And as they went out of the synagogue, they besought that these words," etc.; there was no opposition as yet.

to the city of Iconium, which stood on a plain about sixty miles from Antioch.

The proceedings at Iconium were but a repetition of what had taken place at Antioch. A great many of both Jews and Gentiles believed ; but the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, until at length the city was divided into two factions, the one holding with the Apostles, the other hostile to them ; and so it continued until their enemies, gaining over the rulers, formed a conspiracy to ill-treat and to stone Paul and Barnabas, who then fled to the hill-country of Lycaonia, and preached Christ to the rude and primitive people of Lystra and Derbe.

The Apostles' stay at Lystra was remarkable for one of those violent revulsions of popular feeling that are not uncommon amongst excitable and half-barbarous races. When the people saw the miraculous cure of the cripple by St. Paul (xiv. 8-10) they would fain have worshipped the strangers as gods (see Note 3) ; but, when the spell of reverence was broken by the Apostles' own words and entreaties, and their disappointed feelings had been worked upon by the machinations of the hostile Jews of Antioch and Iconium, they stoned Paul, and treated as criminals the men whom, but a little while before, they had desired to propitiate with divine honours (vv. 11-19).

To Derbe, likewise, they carried the good news of redemption ; and then, having made many disciples, they visited again in turn these several towns—Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,—confirming the disciples in the faith and ordaining presbyters over them, and so exercising to the full their apostolic powers.

Then, returning to Antioch in Syria, they gave an

account of their mission to the assembled Church, showing "how God had opened the door of faith unto thē Gentiles."

The fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's narrative brings us to another and most important landmark in the early history of the Church ; and that is the assembly and proceedings of the first Christian Council for the settlement of controversy (A. D. 50).

The Church of Antioch, as we have seen, originated the evangelization of the Gentiles (under the guidance of the Spirit), and had become the centre of the Gentile Churches ; while the Jewish Church of Jerusalem was the stronghold of "that severe and unbending Hebraism which seems, as a rule, to have marked the converted Pharisee," and which took alarm at the larger Gospel that obtained at Antioch and in the newly founded Churches of Asia. With this feeling it was that certain Jewish Christians from the Church of Jerusalem came to Antioch, and, setting aside the authority of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, pretended to teach authoritatively the necessity of circumcision and the observance of the ceremonial law of Moses even in the case of *Gentile* Christians. These Judaizers (see Note 4) were resisted by Paul and Barnabas, and by the Church of Antioch generally ; yet its peace being greatly disturbed, it resolved to submit the decision of the question to the Mother Church of Jerusalem, and to send Paul and Barnabas and certain others as their representatives (xv. 1, 2).

At Jerusalem, therefore, the Apostles and elders and brethren assembled to consider the matter, certain of the Pharisees which believed representing and supporting the Judaizing party (ver. 5).

St. Peter, in striking agreement with St. Paul, insisted on salvation by Christ alone, and he resisted the putting such a yoke upon the necks of the Gentile disciples. St. Paul, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, pleaded the cause of Gentile liberty. St. James confirmed their verdict by an appeal to Scripture; and, finally, the great principle was conceded—the absolute freedom of the Gentile-Christian from Mosaic ordinances and ceremonial law. To give effect to this decision of the whole Church, a circular letter was written in the name of “the Apostles and elders and brethren” (the whole assembled Church) to their Gentile brethren “in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia,” expressing the resolution of the Council, and confirming them in their Christian liberty; forbidding only such things as would specially give offence to the Jewish Christians.

In the proceedings of this first Council it is instructive to observe how clearly the whole theory of Church government appears to be laid down. The standard of reference was the Word of God, while the Church, according to Christ’s promise (guided by the Spirit of God:—“it seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and to us”), exercised her judicial functions, in applying that criterion, and discriminating between good and evil, truth and falsehood.¹

This letter brought great joy and consolation, not

¹ See the twentieth Article, where the Church’s power is defined as partly legislative,—“She hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and” —partly judicial—“she hath authority in controversies of faith,” not to make articles of belief, but to decide what is Apostolic doctrine, “ruling her decisions by a reference to the Holy Scripture, and to the interpretation put upon it by the Church when as yet Christendom was undivided.”—DEAN GOULBURN.

only to the Church in Antioch, but to the Gentile Christians generally; and the work of teaching and preaching the Word of God was now carried on without hindrance by Paul and Barnabas and Silas and many others.

NOTES—LESSON VI.

“*The Roman Proconsul.*” The governor of an *imperial province* of the Roman Empire (*i.e.* a province immediately under the Emperor) was called a *proprator*, or more properly a *legatus*; and under him were procurators or high stewards, governors of subordinate imperial provinces or districts.

The governor of a *senatorial province* (a province ruled by the senate) had the designation of *proconsul*, vaguely rendered *deputy* in the English New Testament, as in the present case (xiii. 7).

The changes that took place in the government of provinces, and the frequent transference of provinces from the senate to the Emperor, and *vice versa*, made it difficult for an historian always to designate these governors with strict accuracy; but scholars have remarked how correctly St. Luke has observed the distinctions here referred to.

2. “*Here John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.*” In the absence of information in the narrative, why John Mark returned so hastily to Jerusalem can only be conjectured. Some have supposed (with Bishop Wordsworth) that being probably a convert of St. Peter, and not knowing how far that Apostle would approve of the preaching of the Gospel in a heathen country, he hesitated to take so bold a step. Others suppose him to have been “drawn from the work of God by the attractions of an earthly home.”

3. “*They would fain have worshipped the strangers as gods.*” That the gods occasionally visited the earth in human

form was a belief that obtained very generally amongst the ancients, and legends of this nature were current in Lycaonia. At Lystra, Jupiter was worshipped. Hence it was naturally supposed that if the strangers were gods, one of them could be none other than he whose temple stood at their city gate; and if so, his companion would be Mercury, who was said often to accompany Jupiter on these mundane visits.

4. *The Judaizers* were for a long time a numerous and powerful party, and they laboured unceasingly to destroy the influence of St. Paul, who had so plainly declared, "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." They wished to impose the whole law of Moses, and especially circumcision, upon Gentiles as well as Jews; and could they have had their own way, their bigoted exclusion and superstitious principles would soon have destroyed all true Christianity.

The other destructive principle at work was the pseudo-philosophic or rationalizing element of Grecian origin. Besides these the heresies were numerous; some Christians denying the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 12), while others said it was already past (2 Tim. ii. 18). There were even then many Antichrists (1 John ii. 18); and St. Paul tells us that "the mystery of iniquity" was already at work. (See CONYBEARE and HOWSON's *Life of St. Paul*, ch. xiii.)

PASSAGES OR WORDS NEEDING EXPLANATION :—

(a) "*Suffered He their manners*" (xiii. 18); or rather, as in the marginal version, "bore or fed them as a nurse beareth or feedeth her child" (see Deut. i. 31).

(b) "*And after that He gave them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years*" (ver. 20); or, according to the reading of the most ancient copies, "And having destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot for about four hundred and fifty years, and afterwards gave them judges," etc. Thus the four hundred and fifty years would include the whole period from the birth of Isaac to the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, B.C. 1896 to B.C. 1451, viz., four hundred and forty-five years.

(c) "*Ordained*" (ver. 48). Signifying, that is, according to the meaning of the Greek word, "set in order for," or "disposed to," and not *pre-ordained*.

(d) "*Devout and honourable women*" (ver. 50). Proselytes, that is, to Judaism, and high in social rank.

(e) "*Jupiter*" (xiv. 12). The Roman name of the god called by the Greeks *Zeus*, "the father of gods and men."

(f) "*Mercurius*," or Mercury (ver. 12). The Roman name of the god known amongst the Greeks as *Hermes*, and who was accounted the spokesman or interpreter of the gods.

LESSON VII.

ST. PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR—PAUL AND SILAS VISIT THE CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR—THEY CROSS INTO EUROPE—THE APOSTLES AT PHILIPPI, THESSALONICA, AND BEREÆ—ST. PAUL AT ATHENS. (xv. 36-41, xvi. xvii.)

ST. PAUL, as we have seen, was a man truly in earnest. His heart was always in his work, and he did it thoroughly. Even when a persecutor and injurious, his measures were characteristic of his nature. They were no half measures. And when he became himself a Christian and an Apostle, all the energy of his nature was put forth to build up the faith that once he had sought to destroy. He became the greatest missionary that ever lived, as well as the most successful. He went forth into heathen lands, and into inhospitable countries, bearing the banner of the Cross, daunted by no difficulties, appalled by no dangers, counting not his life dear in the service of his Divine Master, winning thousands of souls to Christ, and planting churches in many cities until then wholly given up to idolatry. And even in the intervals between his great missionary tours, his heart and his affections were ever with his beloved converts, thinking of their welfare, and desiring nothing so much as to see them face to face, that his joy might be full.

Thus we find that, after a time of busy activity at Antioch, his desire to revisit the churches of Asia formed itself at last into a fixed resolution, and found expression in his words to Barnabas, "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of God, and see how they do." Then arose that memorable contention between him and his brother Apostle, which ended in their separation,—Barnabas, taking his kinsman Mark, proceeded to Cyprus; while Paul chose Silas, and (followed by the prayers of their brethren at Antioch) set out on his second great missionary tour (xv. 36-41).

Doubtless St. Paul was grieved to lose the aid and companionship of his old friend and fellow-labourer Barnabas; but perhaps it was best so. Barnabas seems to have lacked nerve for the bolder venture on which Paul was now entering; not being wholly emancipated from his Jewish prejudices, or from lack of moral courage (see Gal. iii. 11), he might have hesitated to commit himself to the bold course which St. Paul followed without hesitation or misgiving.¹ If so, may we not trace, even in this apparently unpropitious event, the overruling Hand of Christ?

Reversing the order of his last tour, Paul and his companion Silas passed first through Cilicia, and then pushed on through the passes of Mount Taurus to the tableland on which Derbe and Lystra stood. At Lystra Paul enlisted in Christ's service the youthful Timothy;

¹ By a reference to 1 Cor. ix. 6, Philem. 24, and Col. iv. 10, we shall see that the estrangement between Paul and Barnabas and Mark was not lasting; for we find Paul, six years afterwards, holding up Barnabas to the Corinthians as an example, and eleven years afterwards Mark ministered to Paul during his imprisonment at Rome.

and (that he might not be rejected by the Jews) circumcised him; for his mother was a Jewess,—thus carrying out his maxim, that “in things indifferent, expediency is the highest principle” (xvi. 1-3).

Then the Apostles and their minister left Lycaonia; and passed through Phrygia and Galatia, confirming the churches, and delivering to them the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem. Finally, the Spirit led them to the city of Troas, from whence they looked across the narrow strait that here separates Asia from Europe.

Not long did they remain in doubt as to their future course; for that very night it was revealed to St. Paul, who saw in a vision a man of Macedonia, saying, “Come over, and help us” (vv. 4-9).

Thus did the Spirit of Jesus lead His servants onwards; and “assuredly gathering that the Lord had called them” to carry the glad tidings into Europe, they took ship at Troas, and landed the next day at Neapolis in Thrace.

Thence, over the great “Egnatian Way” (the high road of Roman troops and merchandise), they went on twelve miles to Philippi in Macedonia, then a Roman colony, and famous as the scene of the great battle (B.C. 42) that swept away the Roman republic, and established the Empire, whose highways were to become the highways of the Cross.

St. Paul began his mission, as usual, by preaching to the Jews. At Philippi, they appear to have been too few in number to establish a regular synagogue; and so they met in an oratory by the river side for their accustomed worship.

How the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, who was

baptized with her household, and showed immediately the fruits of her faith by her gratitude to those who had ministered to her in spiritual things ; how St. Paul exorcised the poor slave girl,—thus bringing down upon himself and Silas the vengeance of the men who made a gain of her oracular mutterings ; how the Apostles, arrested, beaten, thrown into prison, but filled with the Spirit, rejoiced in tribulation, and sang praises to God,—St. Luke tells us in few but comprehensive words. And, as their fellow prisoners listened in astonishment to such unwonted sounds from men who lay bleeding and bound in the inner dungeon, an earthquake shook the prison, opened the doors, and freed Paul and Silas from their chains. The hand of the terrified jailer (raised against his own life, which, had the prisoners escaped, would have been forfeited to the Roman law) was stayed by the reassuring voice of the prisoner whom but a little while before he had beaten without mercy. In answer to the man's earnest inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved." But St. Paul spoke of no mere change of opinion, but of that living faith which receives Christ into the heart and unites the believer to Him.

The conversion of the jailer and the baptism of himself and family, and the dismay of the magistrates, who discovered that they had themselves flagrantly offended against Roman law by scourging a Roman citizen, complete St. Luke's graphic narrative of the events at Philippi (vv. 13-39).

In no haste to comply with the magistrates' request, Paul and Silas first confirmed and comforted the disciples, and then, apparently leaving St. Luke and

Timothy at Philippi, they passed on through Macedonia to Thessalonica, the capital and the residence of the Roman Governor (ver. 40, xvii. 1).

Here, in the synagogue of the Jews, Paul showed from the Old Testament Scriptures how the Messiah was to suffer and rise again from the dead, and that all these prophecies had been fulfilled in Jesus. Some of the Jews believed, and of the devout Greeks or proselytes a great number, and of the chief women not a few; but the old jealousy and enmity of the unbelieving Jews speedily produced the fruits it had so often borne before. They maliciously misrepresented the words of the Apostles to the rulers of the city, who took security of Jason for the good behaviour of his guests, and then let them go (xvii. 2-9).

At Berea they next proclaimed the same good tidings. The Jews of that city (more noble than those of Thessalonica) received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures, anxiously inquiring whether they had been indeed fulfilled in the person of Jesus. "Therefore," as we read, "many of them believed," and also of the Gentiles not a few; and so the cause prospered, until hindered by those who would neither enter the Kingdom of Heaven themselves, nor suffer those to enter who would do so (vv. 10-13). Then, the brethren escorting Paul as far as "the sea," he departed from Berea and went on to Athens, where Silas and Timothy were speedily to join him.

Greece (or Achaia, as it was then called), though at that time only a province of the Roman Empire, was still the mistress of Rome in learning, literature, philosophy, and art. Roman youths finished their education at

Athens. Athens was, too, the headquarters of religion ; but a religion that was simply a deification of the powers of nature, and had no connection with morality. Its chief features were statuary and creature-worship. It was the very perfection of idolatry. The uncouth idols of Eastern, or semi-barbarous, countries here gave place to forms of beauty which we still admire, but vainly attempt to imitate. At every step the stranger came upon images of gods and goddesses graven with surprising skill ; chief amongst which, the statue of Minerva (the masterpiece of Phidias and the triumph of Greek art) invited the admiration of beholders.

At Athens, too, St. Paul was first brought into contact with the philosophers of Greece, the Epicureans and the Stoics,—whose principles, however different, were almost equally opposed to the sublime teachings of Christianity. (See Note 1.)

Here the Apostle gazed upon a fine city wholly given up to idolatry and vainglory. He saw that these Athenians,—so clever in art, so richly endowed in mind,—cared only for amusement and intellectual or sensual gratification ; and were utterly ignorant of the one true God. His spirit was deeply stirred, and he felt he must at once deliver his message without waiting for Silas and Timothy.

But St. Paul's task needed all the tact and eloquence of which he was so great a master. He was about to address, not a rude Lycaonian tribe, but an audience of which the world could not show the like. To these subtle, critical, proudly intellectual, sarcastic, and self-satisfied Athenians he had to set forth, as the one Saviour and Judge, a Man Who had been crucified as

a malefactor, and to testify how God had raised Him from the dead, and given to Him all power in Heaven and on earth.

And so we may mark, that though, in some cities in which an important work was done, no speech of St. Paul is placed on record, yet here at Athens, where scarcely any impression was made, a full summary of his address is given to us. This, doubtless, is because of its important bearing on the religion, philosophy, and civilization of the heathen world, in connexion with the Gospel of Christ.

On the famous Areopagus, or Hill of Mars (see Note 2), in presence of legislators, philosophers, orators, poets, and wits, did this earnest Hebrew man stand undaunted as Christ's ambassador; and his speech was characterized by a judgment, a power, and an eloquence, that to this day command our admiration. His first words were courteous, and commendatory; and such as would at once excite both interest and attention. He bore witness to the Athenians being "scrupulously religious" (see Note 3)—in the sense in which they understood religion—as the honour they paid to the gods and their anxiety to omit none testified. Even the Unknown God had His altar. They paid homage to powers greater than themselves; and, though they ignorantly worshipped them, it was still matter for approval; but the Apostle did not flinch from telling them the truth. He exposed the worthlessness of the gross polytheism and creature-worship he saw around him; he reproved the proud exclusiveness which regarded all other races as barbarous; and he told them of God's call to repentance, of the judgment to come, of the Judge whom God had

appointed, and whom (in proof thereof) He had raised from the dead (vv. 22-31).

Here St. Paul seems to have been cut short by a derisive shout from his audience. Some mocked, while others said more courteously, "We will hear thee another time concerning this matter."

Nevertheless, the Apostle's words did not wholly fall to the ground; for, though the preaching of the Cross by Paul was to the Greeks, as a people, "foolishness," yet some among them "clave to him." One of these was Dionysius, a judge of the Areopagus; so that to a few even of the Athenians Christ became as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (vv. 32-34).

NOTES—LESSON VII.

1. "*The philosophers of Greece, the Epicureans and the Stoics.*"

The *Epicureans* (so named from Epicurus, the founder of the school) were the practical Atheists of the day, and their philosophy was Materialism. They derided the popular mythology, without believing in anything better. They denied God's government of the world and the immortality of the soul; and as pleasure or self-gratification, in some form or another, was their chief good and pursuit, their principles may be summed up in the maxim—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The philosophy of the *Stoics* was much better than this, and "in some of its ethical language there was an apparent approximation to Christianity."¹ It taught indifference to the pleasures of sense, and that a stern endurance, or absence of feeling, was the highest virtue. Some of the best men of

¹ Amongst the later Stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius were remarkable instances of this near approach in principle to Christianity.

ancient times were guided by its principles, but (inculcating as they did a lofty pride) they were almost as much opposed to the sublime teachings of Christianity, as those of the rival sect.

2. "*On the famous Areopagus, or hill of Mars.*" On this hill was held the most ancient and solemn Athenian court of judicature. It decided both civil and religious cases, and its judges were styled Areopagites. St. Paul appears to have been taken to Mars' Hill, not to be tried before this tribunal, but as a suitable place of public resort for the consideration of weighty or religious questions.

3. PASSAGES IN ST. PAUL'S SPEECH NEEDING EXPLANATION OR COMMENT :—

(a) "*Scrupulously religious,*" as the original words may be rendered, and which was, it would seem, St. Paul's meaning; but the "too superstitious" of our English version quite fails to express it.

(b) "*Your devotions*" (ver. 23), or, more correctly, "objects of worship."

(c) "*For we are also His offspring*" (ver. 28). St. Paul makes this quotation from Aratus, a Greek poet, a native of Cilicia, with whose writings he was evidently familiar. The passage from which the words are taken has been translated as follows :—

" He animates the mart and crowded way,
The restless ocean and the sheltered bay;
Doth care perplex? is lowering danger nigh?
We are His offspring, and to Him we fly."

In Cleanthes, another Greek poet, nearly the same words occur.

(d) "*God winked at*" (ver. 30), *i.e.*, God hath overlooked.

LESSON VIII.

ST. PAUL AT CORINTH—HE VISITS JERUSALEM AND ANTIOCH, TOUCHING AT EPHESUS—RETURNS TO EPHESUS ON HIS THIRD GREAT MISSIONARY TOUR—PLANTING OF THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS—THE APOSTLE REVISITS THE CHURCHES OF EUROPE. (xviii—xx. 1, 2.)

CORINTH, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia or Greece, was the city next visited by St. Paul. As a great commercial resort, connected with the chief cities of the world both east and west—Rome, Alexandria, and the cities of the Ægean—it was a centre from which the light of Christianity might be radiated in many and opposite directions.

This, and his Lord's gracious encouragement (xviii. 9, 10), no doubt led St. Paul to make Corinth his headquarters for many months. Here the Apostle began his work, as elsewhere, by reasoning with the Jews in their synagogue every Sabbath; while, on week-days, he wrought diligently at his trade of tent-making, lodging with a Christian Jew of Pontus named Aquila, who (with his wife Priscilla) had been expelled from Rome by a decree of the Emperor Claudius (xviii. 1-4; see Note 1).

The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia (ver. 5), and the favourable report of which they were

the bearers, cheered the Apostle greatly; so that he was stirred up ("pressed in the spirit") to enter more boldly upon his missionary labours; but the wicked and malicious opposition, of the unbelieving Jews, soon obliged him to withdraw altogether from their synagogue; and, leaving them with words of solemn warning, ("Your blood be upon your own heads,") he turned altogether to the Gentiles, and gathered his congregation in the house of a disciple—Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, who believed and was baptized by Paul. And, still further to strengthen the hands of His servant, Jesus appeared to him in a vision of the night, speaking to him words of comfort, and assuring him that He had much people in that city (xviii. 6-11).

Accordingly, we find the enmity of the Jews receiving an effectual check from Gallio, the new governor of the province. To Gallio's judgment-seat they had brought the man whose teaching they set at nought, and whose person they would gladly have consigned to a Roman dungeon (vv. 12-17). But Gallio would not listen to them.

Besides the planting of the Church in Corinth and its neighbourhood, St. Paul's stay, in that city, was made memorable by the commencement of that series of letters, or epistles, to the churches, which form so important a part of our New Testament Scriptures.

During this, his first visit to Corinth, he wrote his first and second Epistles to the Thessalonians; which, so clearly, reveal to us the very thoughts that, at this time, occupied the mind of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. (See Note 2.)

After fully a year and a half of, apparently, unmolested labour, Paul determined to go up to Jeru-

saalem to keep a festival (probably Pentecost), and to carry out a vow he had voluntarily taken upon himself. (See Note 3.)

St. Paul left Corinth in the spring of the year A.D. 54. Sailing to Syria by way of Ephesus (the chief city of western Asia Minor), he preached to his countrymen there; and they not only listened with interest, but would have detained him longer amongst them. Promising to return, if God permitted, after his visit to the Holy City, (from which nothing must now divert him,) he continued his voyage to Syria, and landed at Cæsarea. Having gone up to Jerusalem as he purposed (and as St. Luke briefly notices, ver. 22), he speedily returned to Antioch, the headquarters of his mission.

After a brief stay (two or three weeks probably) at Antioch, St. Paul commenced, with his characteristic energy, his third great missionary and apostolic tour.

St. Luke briefly epitomizes his journey as far as Ephesus, in the words, "And he (Paul) went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening the disciples" (ver. 23); and, "having passed through all the upper coasts, came to Ephesus" (xix. 1).

Ephesus was, at this time, the capital of the Roman province called Asia in the New Testament, which included all the western portion of Asia Minor. It was the residence, therefore, of the Roman Proconsul, and important, likewise, as a great commercial city—the headquarters of Greek and Roman merchants, and of Jewish traders. It was also noted as the seat of Eastern philosophy, as well as, for the knowledge of

the arts of magic, possessed by its inhabitants. Its celebrity was still further increased by one of the most magnificent heathen temples of those times—a beautiful Grecian structure dedicated to the Grecian goddess Artemis, called by the Romans Diana ; but instead of a statue of the graceful huntress, whom the Greeks worshipped in their own land under that name, the object of veneration here enshrined, was a rough-hewn and grotesque image of a female, representing the prolific powers of nature.¹

All this was now, gradually, to give place to the benign influences of Christianity, and in later times Ephesus became the seat of a great bishopric ; its Christian Bishop governing, not only the church of that city, but many other Christian congregations.

The “certain disciples” (xix. 1) whom St. Paul found there, who had heard nothing of the gifts of the Spirit, were, probably, disciples of Apollos, who had been “taught diligently” by him, when he knew only the baptism of John (xviii. 25). By that baptism (which they appear to have received) they had confessed their sinfulness ; and now they acknowledged Christ as their Saviour, by being baptized into His Name. After this, Paul, in the fulness of his apostolic powers, laid his hands upon them, and they received the gifts of the Holy Ghost (xix. 5, 6).

And now the Apostle (having returned to the Ephesian Jews according to his promise) continued those reasonings in their synagogue, which had been broken

¹ For a fuller account of Ephesus and its temple, in the time of St. Paul, see “Life and Epistles of St. Paul” by Conybeare and Howson, and “Christian History and Evidences” by the Bishop of London.

off when, at his last visit to their city, he hurried away to continue his homeward voyage (xviii. 20). For three months, he spake boldly to them about that heavenly kingdom of Christ upon earth, into which he so earnestly invited them in the Name of his Divine Master. But when they hardened their hearts, and spake evil of the new way of faith and obedience, he withdrew from their synagogue; and, forming a separate Christian congregation, worshipped with them in the lecture-room of a disciple named Tyrannus. For about two years and a half did Paul continue at Ephesus, building up the Church, and spreading the knowledge of the Lord Jesus throughout the entire province (xix. 8-10).

Ephesus, as we have seen, was famous as the city of magic and of false miracles, and this was the reason, we may suppose, why in this place—in the presence of these workers of lying wonders—"God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul" (vv. 11, 12). Those unbelieving Jews, however, who, in imitation of St. Paul, used our Lord's Name as a charm, were signally rebuked for their profanity (vv. 13, 16), so that fear came upon all who practised these unlawful arts, and many believed. The power of the Gospel was further manifested by the conscience-stricken magicians bringing together their books of magic, and burning them before all men, proving thereby their sincerity and self-denial, for the manuscripts destroyed were worth nearly £2000 of our money.¹

Thus heathenism and its practices gave place gradually to Christianity; but those whose interests were identified with their continuance, were roused to active

¹ Their value has been estimated at £1770.

and bitter opposition against the new religion. Of this we have an example in the riot of Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen. The sale of their portable models of the temple of Diana and its idol rapidly declined, as the belief gained ground that "gods made with hands are no gods;" and all the eloquence and authority of the chief magistrate were needed to quiet the enraged artificers (vv. 23-41; see Note 4).

St. Paul had laboured about two years and a half at Ephesus, and Christianity was not only firmly established in that great city, but its doctrines had spread, more or less, over the entire province. A great work had been accomplished; and now the Apostle's presence being more needed in other regions, he determined to revisit the churches of Macedonia, as St. Luke tells us very briefly (xx. 1, 2); but, if we wish to know something of what was passing in his mind at this time—of the hopes and fears that influenced him—we must turn to his epistles. The trials that were to be more or less St. Paul's lot for the remainder of his life, began about this time to cast their shadow upon his path. Dangers from without (as in the disturbance raised by Demetrius), bodily sickness, and, most of all, the care of the churches, bowed down his spirit greatly. His first Epistle to the Corinthians (see Note 5) he seems to have sent to the Corinthian Church by Titus.² He now went to Troas, there to await the return of his messenger and deputy. Would the Church of Corinth receive his counsel and reproof? This he longed to know; but time passed, and Titus came not. Moreover news had meanwhile reached him that, at Corinth, the Judaizers were striving to undermine his authority, and

² Dean Stanley and Professor Lightfoot concur in this view.

even to throw doubt upon his integrity¹ (2 Cor. xii. 11, 12, 17, 18).

Unable any longer to bear the suspense, he left Troas, and crossing into Macedonia, found consolation amongst the Christians of Philippi. Here, at last, Titus joined him, and brought news that "filled him with comfort" (2 Cor. vii. 6); for the Corinthians had repented of their offences, and given heed to his reproof. Still, however, false brethren were infusing a poisonous leaven amongst them; and the Apostle hastened to address to the Corinthian Church (and to the other churches of Achaia) his second Epistle, which he likewise intrusted to Titus, his friend and fellow-labourer. (See Note 5.)

NOTES—LESSON VIII.

1. "*Because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome*" (xviii. 2). It is not certain why the Emperor Claudius issued this decree; but, if Christianity had been already carried to Rome, as some suppose, the angry and turbulent opposition of the Jews, showing itself, it is likely, in some riotous act, may have caused their expulsion from the city.

2. *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians.* St. Paul's first visit to Corinth was marked by the commencement of his epistles to the churches. Both the first, and second, of his Epistles to the Thessalonians, which begin the course, were written at Corinth; the first Epistle, probably, late in the year A.D. 52. It was called forth by the report which Timothy had brought of its condition, and the object of the letter appears to have been threefold, viz., to express the Apostle's love for his converts; to encourage them under persecution;

¹ St. Paul was at this time interested in raising a collection for the poor Jewish Christians of Palestine among the churches of Europe.

and to correct certain errors into which they had fallen ; especially their belief that their deceased Christian relatives would lose the glorious sight of Christ's second appearing which they expected themselves immediately to behold. Hence the Apostle's description of the resurrection of the saints at the Second Advent (iv. 13-18).

The Second Epistle (A.D. 53) contains a prophecy of the last Antichrist, and assures the Thessalonian Christians that he will be revealed prior to Christ's second coming ; thus showing them that the latter great event was not so imminent as they thought (ii. 1-9).

3. "*A vow he (Paul) had voluntarily taken upon himself.*" The ablest commentators are agreed that this vow was taken by St. Paul, and not by Aquila, as some suggest ; "and this is the more natural and suitable connection, for, the writer is too intent on tracing the history of the Apostle, to record an immaterial circumstance respecting one of his companions." —HUMPHRY.

"Similar to the Nazarite vow, was the vow frequently made by devout Jews on their recovery from sickness, or deliverance from danger or distress ; who, for thirty days before they offered sacrifices, abstained from wine and shaved the hair off their head. This usage illustrates the conduct of Paul as related in Acts xviii. 18. The Apostle, in consequence of a providential deliverance from some imminent peril, not recorded by the sacred writer, bound himself by a vow which the law in this case required him to pay at Jerusalem." —HORNE.

4. "*To quiet the enraged artificers.*" In St. Luke's account of the riot raised by Demetrius it should be noticed " (1) that the Asiarchs, officers connected with the old religion, were his friends ; (2) that the priests of Diana took no prominent part against him ; and the outbreak, which originated with the lower classes, does not appear to have been countenanced by the upper ; (3) that the town-clerk speaks of the worship of Diana, as a thing not at all called in ques-

tion by the Apostle (vv. 36, 37). From these circumstances, two conclusions may be drawn : (1) that, whatever the craftsmen of Demetrius might feel, the intelligent part of the community had no zeal in behalf of the old religion ; (2) that St. Paul, proceeding with his accustomed moderation, had not so much sought to attack the established system, as to set up another which should quietly displace it."—HUMPHRY.

5. *St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians.* St. Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians in the spring of A.D. 57, as it is supposed, and in the third year of his residence at Ephesus. It refers, especially, to the heresies and immoralities of the Corinthian Church. The members of this Church were distracted by the spirit of party ; some claiming to be followers of one Apostle, and some of another ; and the Judaizers also were busy amongst them, calumniating St. Paul, and even denying his apostleship ; while Antinomian freethinkers infused a poisonous leaven, teaching and defending practical immorality. Others so far forgot the spirit of the new faith, as to bring malicious actions against their brethren, in the heathen courts of law. Women addressed the congregation, contrary to apostolic teaching, and even the Holy Communion itself was profaned by revelry and excess. All this was unsparingly denounced by St. Paul, and he also replied to certain important questions. "This letter is, in its contents, the most diversified of all St. Paul's Epistles, and in proportion to the variety of its topics is the depth of its interest for ourselves. For by it we are introduced, as it were, behind the scenes of the Apostolic Church, and its minutest features are revealed to us under the light of daily life."

The second Epistle to the Corinthians was written in Macedonia, and (as it seems) towards the end of the same year. "The purpose of the Apostle was to encourage and tranquillize the great body of the Church, and to vindicate his apostolic character by a statement of facts, and a threat of punishment to be inflicted on the contumacious." (See "Life and Epistles of St. Paul" by Conybeare and Howson.)

LESSON IX.

ST. PAUL'S SECOND VISIT TO CORINTH—ST. PAUL AT TROAS
—AT MILETUS—ST. PAUL'S RECEPTION BY THE CHURCH
AT JERUSALEM—ST. PAUL IN THE CUSTODY OF THE
ROMAN COMMANDER. (xx—xxii.)

AFTER despatching Titus to Corinth, with his second epistle to the Christians of that city, and before following him to the capital of Achaia, St. Paul seems to have continued his apostolic labours by visiting Illyricum, and the mountainous region of Northern Greece ; and it was, probably, early winter when he approached Corinth for the second time ; not, as on the first occasion, to preach the Gospel to a people ignorant of it, but to confirm a church already founded. Unhappily, however, his task was not only to confirm, but to admonish, and even to punish ; for there were those amongst its members “who had cast off the morality of the Gospel ; friends who had forgotten his love, and enemies who disputed his divine commission.” While, therefore, he came to encourage the faithful, and to restore the penitent, he was fully prepared, “in the plenitude of his apostolic power,” to cast out of the Church the disobedient and the impure, as he had pledged himself to do in his last epistle (2 Cor. x. 11, xiii. 2).

But before exercising his authority as an Apostle, he would doubtless put those to shame who denied it, by the exercise of that miraculous power, which, he himself informs us, is one of the "signs of an Apostle" (2 Cor. xii. 12); for the Corinthian Christians were fain to confess that God was with him. All opposition ceased; unless (as some have supposed) it was that of a few individual members, who, still clinging to their heretical doctrines, and to the particular sins springing from them, refused submission. And, if there were such cases, "we know from St. Paul's own description (1 Cor. v. 3-5) the very form and manner of the punishment inflicted. A solemn assembly of the Church was convened; the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ was especially invoked; the cases of the worst offenders were separately considered, and those whose sins required so heavy a punishment were publicly cast out of the Church,"—suspended from their Church privileges until they should repent.

Thus we see that in primitive and apostolic times there were no independent communities or individuals. All Christians were members of a divinely instituted and visible corporation; and to admit, suspend, or expel its members, was tantamount to that binding and loosing, that opening or closing of the Kingdom of Heaven, of which Christ had spoken.

And how much we owe to this divine incorporation! We owe to it, under God, nothing less than the preservation of the Christian faith, which, without it, would long since have become that mere conflict of individual opinions as to the nature and person of our Lord, the Sacraments, and the meaning of Scripture, which it has too often become amongst seceders. We have

seen how, in apostolic times, Christianity was preserved from the corruptions of the Judaizers by the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem; and so, in after years, the Church was cleansed of the Arian, Sabellian, Nestorian and Eutychian heresies by the General Councils. To the same source do we owe the creeds, those definitions of our faith, which, "drawn from Scripture, serve as keys to Scripture."

St. Paul remained three months in Greece (xx. 3), and chiefly, we may suppose, at Corinth; but probably visiting and confirming other churches; and it was during this period that he wrote his Epistle to the Galatians (see Note 1) and his Epistle to the Romans (see Note 2).

A collection, for the poor Jewish Christians of Palestine, had been in progress for more than a year (2 Cor. viii., ix.), and it was now intrusted to individuals, chosen by the Church, who were to accompany St. Paul to Jerusalem. St. Paul's intention of going to Syria by sea was frustrated by a plot formed by the unbelieving Jews, who appear to have been bent upon doing him some bodily harm, even, we may believe, to the cutting short his career. This obliged the Apostle to take a different route; and, instead of embarking at Cenchreæ, (at which place many Jews were settled for commercial purposes, and where, probably, their conspiracy had a good prospect of success,) he took the longer journey through Macedonia; finally crossing with St. Luke to Troas (vv. 3-6). This visit of St. Paul to Troas (vv. 7-12) is memorable, not only for the manifestation of Christ's power and unseen presence, by the restoration of Eutychus to life through the instrumentality of His Apostle; but also

for the glimpse it gives us of how the first day of the week was observed in the earliest times of the Church.

The Gentile Christians did not regard the law of the Jewish Sabbath as more binding upon them than the law of circumcision or any other Jewish ordinance; but the first day of the week was celebrated as "the Lord's day"—the day of His Resurrection. Accordingly, on that day, we read how "the disciples came together to break bread" (ver. 7); and we learn from early Christian writers that a sermon, the Lord's Supper, and a collection of alms for the poor, were included in the day's services.

The narrative (vv. 13, 16) seems almost to imply that St. Paul was able to control the course of the vessel in which he sailed; and so some suppose him to have hired a small coaster to take him as far as Patara, where he could cross to Tyre in a merchant ship. Yet, had he done so, he would surely have touched at Ephesus, rather than at Miletus; or, having passed on to the latter place for reasons of which we are ignorant, he would, we can hardly doubt, have gone himself to Ephesus, rather than have sent for the elders or bishops of the Ephesian Church, to meet him at a port thirty miles distant from their own city. He was unwilling apparently to leave Miletus, lest the ship should sail without him.

Be this as it may, St. Paul's weighty words in addressing them are what concern us most (vv. 18, 35). How brief, and yet how comprehensive, is his summary of the Gospel that he preached! (ver. 21)—repentance toward God as our Father and Sovereign, and faith in Christ as our Redeemer and Mediator;—the faith by which we "put on Christ," and are clothed "in the garments of salvation."

“And now,” said the Apostle, “I go bound”—or led captive—“by the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me” (vv. 22, 23). And how earnestly must they have listened to his words, as he discoursed of the Church of God, which He (in the Person of His Son) had purchased with His own Blood, and which he commended to them so solemnly, as to overseers appointed by the Holy Ghost; warning them of grievous wolves ever ready to fall upon the flock, and commending them to God! How deep was the impression produced by his words, and how sharp a trial it was to the Ephesian elders to take a final farewell of so beloved a father in Christ, we learn from the concluding verses of the chapter (vv. 36-38).

Again, at Tyre, we find the Apostle kneeling down on the seashore, and praying with the disciples who followed him thither, when they failed to dissuade him from going up to Jerusalem. At Cæsarea, too, even the warning of Agabus, and the entreaties of his friends, alike failed to alter his determination. “I am ready,” he declares, “not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.” But how deeply their words moved him is evident from his touching expostulation, “What mean ye to weep, and to break my heart?” (xxi. 5-14). Christ was indeed about to show to His Apostle how great things he must suffer for His sake, before entering into the joy of his Lord; but St. Paul, possessed of his Lord’s spiritual presence, rejoiced in tribulation, and “counted all earthly things but loss, if he might win Christ and be found in Him.”

And so St. Paul and his companions "took up their carriages"—"took up," that is, what had to be carried—and continued their journey to Jerusalem.

After the persistent efforts of the Judaizers to oppose and misrepresent the Apostle of the Gentiles, the cordial reception he met with, from the Church of Jerusalem, (vv. 17-20) must have been very grateful to him; but even here, the report had been industriously spread, that St. Paul counselled the Jewish Christians to disregard the ordinances of Moses, as well as the laws and customs of their fathers (ver. 21); and thus the weaker brethren regarded him with suspicion and distrust. Hence the advice, given him by St. James and the elders (vv. 23, 24), which St. Paul (who in things non-essential was ever ready to become "all things to all men") gladly followed; for the peace and unity of the Church was as dear to him as they were to any other Apostle. He had maintained, as we have seen, in opposition to the Judaizers, that the ordinances of Moses and the customs of the Jews, were not binding on Gentile Christians; but, that he did not teach the Jewish Christians to disregard them, was now to be made plain to the Church of the Circumcision.

St. Luke tells us (vv. 27-40) how St. Paul, therefore, went to the Temple, with the four Jewish Christians who had taken the Nazarite's vow (see Note 3), to assist them in carrying it out by paying their ceremonial expenses; how, while there, he fell into the hands of his most inveterate enemies, the Jews of Ephesus;¹ who, regarding him as a renegade and

¹ "The Jews which were of Asia"—the Roman province of that name, of which Ephesus was the capital.

apostate, and supposing him to have profaned the Holy Place by taking Gentiles into it,¹ dragged him out into the streets, and would have inflicted a summary punishment upon him, had he not been rescued by Lysias and his Roman soldiers, who had hastened to the scene of tumult from the adjacent tower of Antonia.²

Standing on the steps leading up to Herod's palace, which was used as the Prætorium or Procurator's residence, and speaking in the Hebrew—that is, the Syro-Chaldaic language—St. Paul answered the charge of apostasy from the Jewish faith that had been brought against him. Passing rapidly in review his Jewish education, his national and religious zeal, and hatred of Christianity, his conversion and subsequent career, he showed how he had been changed by revelation from God, and how he still acted under the direction of the Most High,—facts likely to impress his hearers, and to which they listened with attention, until he spoke of his being sent to the Gentiles, and of their admission to equal privileges with the Jews. Then their fury broke out with redoubled violence. Expressing their anger and dissent by significant actions, peculiar to the people of Eastern countries, they declared that he was unfit to live; and, had Paul been in their power, they would speedily have acted upon that conclusion.

The Roman soldiers, less cruel than his own countrymen, effectually protected him from their violence; but he was only saved from the torture of a Roman

¹ They mistook, apparently, one of the Christian Jews for Trophimus, a Gentile of Ephesus, whom they had seen in St. Paul's company.

² The Roman soldiers quartered in this citadel were always kept under arms at the time of the Jewish festivals to quell any popular disturbance.

scourging by his assertion of Roman citizenship, which quickly placed him in an improved position, and secured him the favour and protection of the chief captain, who hastened to correct the dangerous mistake he had been on the point of committing.¹ (xxii.)

Thus again, as in times past—at Thessalonica, at Corinth, and at Ephesus—so now at Jerusalem, did St. Paul owe his safety, and probably his life, to the Roman power, which, by and by, became so cruel an instrument in the persecution of the Church.

NOTES—LESSON IX.

1. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* was written during his second visit to Corinth, at the close of the year A.D. 57. The Judaizers had succeeded in drawing away these simple-minded and half-barbarous Gauls of north-western Asia Minor from the simplicity of the Gospel; persuading them that circumcision was necessary to that full covenant with God, from which St. Paul would fain debar them. Hence the stern rebuke contained in this the severest of his epistles, in which he maintains the doctrine of free grace, in opposition to the Judaizers' doctrine of circumcision and salvation by the works of the law. Chapters v. and vi. contain various exhortations; but especially the one that we may regard as the keynote of the whole epistle (see v. 1).

2. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, like that to the Galatians, was written at Corinth, probably during the first months of A.D. 58. It was penned by Tertius from St. Paul's dictation, and sent to Rome by Phœbe, a deaconess of Cenchreæ.

In this Epistle the leading doctrine of the Epistle to the

¹ The Roman law awarded severe punishment to any magistrate who should scourge or otherwise torture a Roman citizen.

Galatians—salvation by grace—is more fully set forth. The law, requiring perfect obedience, has power only to condemn ; the Gospel, demanding faith in Christ as the one condition of salvation, has power to save ; and all having sinned, the Gospel is necessary to all.

3. "*The Nazarite's vow.*" The rules to be observed by those who took this vow upon themselves, and thus for a time dedicated themselves to God in a peculiar manner, are laid down in the sixth chapter of the Book of Numbers. To assist a Nazarite in carrying out his vow, by paying for his offerings, was reckoned an act of piety by the Jews.

LESSON X.

**NATURAL CAUSES INSUFFICIENT TO ACCOUNT FOR THE
RAPID SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY—ST. PAUL BEFORE
THE SANHEDRIM—BEFORE FELIX—ACCUSATIONS OF
THE JEWS—ST. PAUL'S DEFENCE—FELIX DETAINS HIM
IN CUSTODY. (xxiii. xxiv.)**

THE unbelieving Jews (though thwarted in their design of putting St. Paul to death) succeeded but too well in depriving him of his liberty ; and thus arresting his missionary and apostolic labours. Hating the Gospel, they not only refused themselves to enter the Kingdom of the Messiah, but they hindered him from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved (1 Thess. ii. 16).

In reviewing St. Paul's missionary career, and the progress of the Church, especially amongst the heathen, we come irresistibly to the conclusion that natural causes alone were altogether insufficient to account for the marvellous results of the apostolic mission, and the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the length and breadth of the Roman Empire.

That a certain proportion of the Jews should have been brought to see (by the light of Old Testament prophecy) that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, may not indeed surprise us ; but the reception of the

apostolic tidings by the Gentile world,—that the preaching of a Jewish stranger should have so marvellous an influence upon the minds of so many thousands of his Greek hearers, persuading them to embrace the wonderful revelation of redemption by Christ, and leading them (in spite of persecution and every kind of discouragement) to seek admission to His Kingdom on earth,—can only be accounted for, by bearing in mind our Lord's promise, that after His Ascension the Holy Ghost would convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. So, on the Day of Pentecost, we see the Spirit poured out upon the Church, and bestowed upon the Apostles in a remarkable and exceptional manner. Their preaching was inspired preaching. The power of the Spirit accompanied their word in the cure of diseases, and in the working of wonders. By the laying on of their hands the Holy Ghost was given with visible signs; while, in the congregations, prophets not only warned the Church of things to come, but revealed men's thoughts and most secret actions.

And in this fulfilment of Christ's promise, we see how entirely true was St. Mark's expression, "the Lord was working with them;" thus daily convincing them that He, Who had made the promise, was at the right hand of Power.

But while, in the propagation of the Gospel, we recognise with reverence this great fact, we need not overlook the secondary causes, which were made subservient to the same great end. These have been traced to three in particular, viz. :—

- (1) The wide dispersion of the Jews, and the knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures and pro-

phesies, acquired by the Gentiles, through attendance at the Jewish synagogues.

- (2) The vast extent, and powerful organization of the Roman Empire.
- (3) The universality of the Greek language.

In all the great cities of the universal Roman Empire, the Jews had settled in large numbers. The Gentiles were freely admitted to their synagogues, where they heard the Old Testament scriptures read and expounded ; and became acquainted with the Messianic prophecies which St. Paul used with such effect in proving that Jesus was the Christ.

All the most civilized countries of the world were united into one great Empire, having a common government and organization. This greatly facilitated travelling, and the communication of ideas between different nations ; while the delicate Greek language (so excellent a medium for propagating doctrine and conveying every shade of meaning) was universally understood. If we add to these special causes, the general expectation that prevailed of some great Deliverer ; as well as the "profound despondency of human affairs, which seems at this time to have brooded like a curse over the whole Roman Empire," we shall see, in this providential ordering of things, in how remarkable a manner the world was prepared for the preaching of a Messiah—a King Who should rule in righteousness ; first as a spiritual King : and finally, as a visible and triumphant King, subduing all nations, and reigning in undisputed sway over all the earth.

But to return to the narrative. We left St. Paul in the hands of the soldiers who had rescued him. The commandant of the Roman garrison was probably at a

loss to know what to do with a prisoner who had come into his custody in a manner so unusual, and who was charged with offences of which he would refuse to be a judge ; but if, like Gallio, he had treated the Jews' accusations with contempt, and restored St. Paul to liberty, the Apostle would inevitably have fallen a victim to the hatred of his implacable and unscrupulous enemies. We plainly see, then, our Lord's overruling providence in the course pursued by Lysias, and in the way in which the Roman power threw its protecting influence, again and again, around Christ's chosen servant.

Claudius Lysias naturally supposed that to bring Paul before a lawful tribunal of his own countrymen was the best way of ascertaining what really was alleged against him ; so, on the morrow, he summoned the Jewish ecclesiastical authorities to sit in judgment on the man whom he had rescued from popular fury.

The spirit by which they were animated became evident, when Ananias commanded the officer to smite the Apostle on the mouth for asserting his integrity ;¹ an action intended to express, symbolically, that the speaker was guilty of falsehood. If in St. Paul's answer, prophetic as it appears to have been,² his indignant feelings mastered him for a moment, he quickly recovered himself, and offered both apology and explanation. That one, who had long been absent from Jerusalem, should not know who filled an office in which there were frequent changes, was only probable, and seems to have been the plain meaning of his words. (See Note 1.)

¹ And perhaps for omitting the respectful title "fathers."

² Josephus informs us that Ananias was killed by the Zealots at the commencement of the Jewish War.

Clearly no fairness was to be expected from the men before whom the Apostle stood ; and his only hope of safety lay in dividing them—in working upon that party feeling, that, even in the council chamber, was ever ready to break out. Of this we have a striking example in what followed. No sooner did the Apostle declare himself a Pharisee, and a champion of their favourite doctrine, the Resurrection from the dead, than the Pharisees and Sadducees, who composed the council, became excited against each other. The Pharisees took the Apostle's part, while the Sadducees¹ answered them with derisive shouts ; and in a little while the confusion and uproar was so great, that Claudius Lysias, alarmed for the safety of his prisoner, (for whose life, as a Roman citizen, he was answerable), sent his soldiers to bring him once more into the citadel.

That night, as the Apostle lay in the Roman barracks, sadly pondering upon the events of the day, (his only human protectors being the foreign soldiers who had twice rescued him from his own countrymen,) Jesus stood once more beside him, speaking words of consolation, and assuring him that, as he had testified of Him in Jerusalem, so, likewise, should he be a witness for His truth at Rome also. Thus encouraged, how truly must Paul have rejoiced in tribulations that brought His Lord so near to him ; and henceforth, how calmly must he have rested in His almighty protection !

Paul's enemies, impatient of the risks and chances of any legal process for insuring his condemnation, bound themselves by a terrible oath either to kill him, before they ate or drank, or to be held accursed from

¹ The Sadducees believed that the soul died with the body.

God. In this plot the chief priests and elders readily took part, so debased had become the leading men of the Jewish nation (xxiii. 14, 15).

How Paul's nephew, who had obtained a knowledge of the conspiracy, carried the information to the Roman commander ; and how promptly his measures were taken for conveying his prisoner beyond the reach of those who sought his life ; we learn from St. Luke's vivid and circumstantial narrative. At nine o'clock that same evening, St. Paul, leaving the fortress with a strong military escort, commenced his journey of seventy miles to Cæsarea. Marching all night across the high mountainous country, that lies between the valley of the Jordan and the western plains, they descended into the latter at about sunrise the next morning. Having brought St. Paul to Antipatris (about two-thirds of the way from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, and beyond the reach of his enemies), the foot soldiers returned to their quarters in the former city. Probably some time during the afternoon of the same day, the centurion in command, with his horsemen and the prisoner whom he had in charge, would enter Cæsarea ; and when he had committed Paul to the care of the Governor Felix (see Note 2), his duties with respect to him would be at an end.

Here, before the Roman Procurator (see Note 3), must St. Paul's accusers now prefer their charge. Accordingly St. Luke tells us (xxiv. 1), that, after five days, Ananias the high priest, the elders, and a certain Roman advocate named Tertullus,¹ came from Jerusalem, and charged Paul (1) with causing disturbances amongst the Jews throughout the world, or Roman Empire ; (2)

¹ The Jews being unfamiliar with Roman law, employed Roman advocates in cases brought before the Roman magistrates.

with being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes ; and (3) with profanation of the Temple at Jerusalem. The first offence amounted to treason against the Emperor, the second to heresy against the law of Moses ; while the third was a crime against both the Jewish and Roman law, for the latter "licensed" certain recognized forms of worship ; and the Jewish religion was one so licensed.

To all these accusations Paul had a ready answer. He had done nothing to cause excitement, much less sedition in Jerusalem ; for neither in the synagogues nor in the city, had he disputed with any one. As for heresy, he believed the law and the prophets, and in the resurrection from the dead ; and he trained himself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men ; while, far from profaning the Temple, he had (after purification) gone there with alms and offerings. The allegations of the Jews were false therefore, and they could not prove them ; and those Jews of Asia who had seized Paul in the Temple had not appeared before Felix to make good their accusations. Had Felix been an upright judge, he would have acquitted Paul and set him at liberty without delay : but that was not his policy. His answer was evasive—
"When Lysias comes down I will decide finally between you." And so, placing the Apostle in military custody (see Note 4), and commanding that he should have every privilege consistent with safe keeping, he deferred the decision of the case, until it should suit him to give his judgment upon it

NOTES—LESSON X.

1. "*The plain meaning of his words.*" Many other meanings have however been given to them, such as a mistake caused by dimness of sight, want of reflection, and a righteous and prophetic denunciation.

2. "*Felix,*" the fourth Roman Governor of Judæa since Herod Agrippa I. He was unprincipled, profligate, and mean. Possessing the power of a king, he ruled, it has been said, "with the spirit of a slave;" and although some of his acts were probably of a beneficial nature, they by no means justified the exaggerated praise of the Roman advocate. He detained Paul a prisoner in hopes of a bribe, for St. Paul had made mention of the "alms" with which he was charged. When recalled to Rome to answer for his misdeeds (A.D. 60), Felix left Paul "bound" to please the Jews, whose complaints he had reason to fear.

3. Judæa, being a district of the imperial province of Syria, was nominally under the *legatus*, or governor, of that province; but his representative, the procurator, or governor of the district, was the actual ruler of the country. When Paul was sent to Cæsarea by Lysias, Felix was the procurator, and Festus succeeded him in that high office.

4. "*Military custody.*" The Roman law recognized three kinds of custody as follows:—

- (1) *Confinement in the public gaol.* In this, the severest of the three, the prisoners were frequently kept in the foulest dungeon, chained and bound in painful positions.
- (2) *Free custody*, in which the accused person was committed to the care of a magistrate or senator, who was responsible for his appearance upon the day of trial. This was the mildest form of detention.

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- (3) *Military custody*, so called because the prisoner was given in charge to a soldier; his right hand being chained to the soldier's left. The soldier was answerable for the safe keeping of the prisoner with his own life. It was to this military custody that Felix committed Paul (xxiv. 23), giving orders at the same time that he should be treated with indulgence.

LESSON XI.

CÆSAREA—ST. PAUL BEFORE FESTUS—BEFORE KING
AGRIPPA—ST. PAUL'S LAST RECORDED SPEECH.
(xxv. xxvi.)

IN the time of St. Paul, Cæsarea, the Roman capital of Judæa, was in all its glory—"a city of sumptuous palaces"—combining all that was needful for magnificence, amusement and health. It stood near the boundary of Galilee and Samaria ; and in its harbour, protected as it was by a stupendous breakwater, ships found a safe anchorage and a complete shelter from the swell of the ocean that set in upon the coast from the south-west.¹ Here was the residence of the Roman procurator, and the quarters of the imperial troops ; and, though built by an Idumæan prince,² it boasted of Greek temples and statues, a theatre and an amphitheatre ; while, approaching it from the sea, the most conspicuous object was a temple dedicated to Cæsar and to Rome. The impress of Rome was, indeed, designedly stamped upon the place. Its harbour was called the "Augustan harbour," and the city itself was known as "Augustan Cæsarea."

Such was the political capital³ of Judæa, in which

¹ Conybeare and Howson.

² Herod the Great built and finished it in twelve years.

³ Tacitus calls it "Judææ caput."

St. Paul was detained by the injustice and caprice of Felix. Here he passed two years of unwilling inactivity, chained day and night to a Roman soldier, and unable to communicate except through friends (xxiv. 23) with the churches he had planted, and whose welfare he had watched over with so anxious and tender a solicitude.

At last the misrule of the Governor resulted in disturbances at Cæsarea, and an increasing hatred to Roman domination throughout the country. Felix was in consequence summoned to Rome to give an account of his administration; and thither the Jews followed him with their accusations, A.D. 60.

Festus, who was then appointed Procurator of Judæa, was a much better man than Felix; yet his accession to power was attended by a new danger to Paul.

Festus had only been three days in Cæsarea when he "went up to Jerusalem" to make himself better acquainted with the people he had come to govern, and to win such popularity as might be got by courtesy and consideration. Hence, for the governed, it was a favourable opportunity for asking favours; and we find Paul's enemies urging, with all importunity, that he might be brought back to Jerusalem (xxv. 2, 3),—the plea being, doubtless, that he should be tried before the Sanhedrim. But although these men were the chief priests and the chief men of the Jews (as St. Luke likewise informs us, ver. 2), they were "lying in wait"—literally "preparing an ambush"—in the way to kill him (ver. 3). Festus, however, did not weakly yield to the injustice of giving up a prisoner who claimed, in virtue of his citizenship, to be tried before the Roman tribunal, and who had been removed from the jurisdiction of the Jewish authorities because of their excited

and prejudiced feelings against him. Festus's answer was therefore firm, though courteous. It was not, he said, the custom of the Romans to deliver a man up to his enemies who might be innocent (ver. 16). The accused was in custody at Cæsarea, whither he would himself return shortly. Let those who wished to prefer a charge against him go down to Cæsarea, and there state their case.

Accordingly, when, after eight or ten days, Festus returned to Cæsarea, a deputation from the Sanhedrim waited upon him, and the next day the Governor had Paul brought before him. The charges preferred against him were substantially the same as before. They declared him guilty of heresy, sacrilege and treason; but they failed entirely to prove the truth of their accusations. Festus perceived at once that Paul was not accused of political crimes, of which a Roman magistrate could take cognizance, but of offences against the religion of the Jews, of which he knew nothing. Partly, therefore, to get rid of the difficulty, but chiefly to conciliate the Jews (ver. 9), he asked Paul whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem, there to be judged by a tribunal of his own countrymen; and so his vacillating conduct would have ended in placing the Apostle in the hands of enemies bent upon his destruction, had not Paul promptly exercised the right of a Roman citizen, and, by appealing to Cæsar, taken his case altogether out of the hands of the procurator. Festus was thereby compelled to send his prisoner to Rome, to be judged by the imperial tribunal, which was a supreme court of appeal.

"I am" (said Paul) "already standing before a Roman tribunal, why then should I be removed to

Jerusalem, where the Jews will have me in their power? I have done them no wrong, as thou thyself perceivest by the failure of their accusation. If I have wronged them, put me to death thyself, as thou hast power to do; but if not, no man can deliver me up to them, and no man shall; for I appeal unto Cæsar.”¹

In all the provinces of the Roman Empire, the supreme judicial and executive power was vested in the Roman governors, whether proconsuls, proprætors or procurators, and for the provincials their decisions were final, unless they were Roman citizens. One who had the franchise of Rome had the right of appealing to the Emperor, who constitutionally exercised the power of reversing the judgments of all inferior authorities.

Festus, we are told (ver. 12), conferred with his council as to the legality of his prisoner's appeal, and finding it perfectly admissible, he at once admitted the plea. Thus Jesus overruled the malice of the Jews and the indecision of Festus to bring about His own divine purpose of conducting His apostle to Rome.

Festus had, indeed, no choice but to send his prisoner to Rome; yet he knew well how frivolous were the charges against him, and that Paul's further detention was due, not to any fault in him, but rather to his own crooked policy. He had no clear perception of this Jewish quarrel, and in his ignorance of how to state it to his lord the Emperor, he was glad to have the advice of Herod Agrippa II., King of Chalcis (see Note 1), who, accompanied by his sister Bernice (see Note 2), had come to pay a complimentary visit to the new Governor of Judæa. But it was not till after “many days” that Festus spoke to his guest of so

¹ Humphry.

unimportant a person as "a certain man left in bonds by Felix;" and how he found that, instead of being accused of political crimes, the Jews charged him with offences against their religion; and (dissembling his real reason—that he might "do the Jews a pleasure") he said, "because he doubted of such questions," he had asked the prisoner whether he would go to Jerusalem to be judged: but instead of agreeing to this he had appealed unto Cæsar.

Agrippa, who had been educated in the Jewish religion, and who probably regarded St. Paul with some curiosity, readily consented to give him a hearing; and so we read that Agrippa and Bernice, with the chief captains and the principal men of the city, came with great pomp, and taking their seats in the judgment-hall, Féstus caused Paul to be brought before them. Then, Agrippa having given him permission to speak, he made the last and most famous of his speeches preserved to us by St. Luke.

Passing by the accusations of profaning the Temple and apostatizing from the Jews' religion, he took the higher ground of an Apostle and Messenger of God; his object being, it would seem, not so much to defend himself as to bring the truth home to his hearers, and to witness for his Lord before kings and rulers. And this he did with great pathos and solemnity; explaining to Agrippa that his only crime was in believing that the hope of the Jews—the hope of a Messiah—had been fulfilled in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. Then he related the wonderful story of his conversion; and how, in obedience to the heavenly vision, he had proclaimed the good tidings throughout all the land of Judæa and also to the Gentiles; witnessing both to small and great

the things that Moses had said should come—that Christ should suffer, and that He should rise from the dead; and for this it was that the Jews sought his life.

To Festus—unacquainted as he was with the religion of the Jews, and accustomed to the indifference to all moral and religious questions that was general amongst the educated Romans—the marvellous story, the strange doctrines and the thrilling earnestness of the Jewish orator, seemed but the offspring of an excited imagination (xxvi. 24). Paul appealed to Agrippa's better knowledge of the matters of which he spoke in proof of his soberness. Then turning solemnly to the Jewish prince, the fearless Apostle exclaimed, with increasing earnestness, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."

What secret impression may have been made upon the mind of the ambitious and pleasure-loving Agrippa we know not; but his answer appears to have been altogether ironical. "In a little time"—with a little persuasion—"thou wouldest make me a Christian." But Paul, taking up the words in all seriousness, replied: "In little and in great (soon and late) I would pray to God that you, and all who hear me, might become like me, except these bonds." And so Paul, forgetful of his own critical position, was anxious only for the good of others. Gently hinting at the bonds in which he was so unjustly detained, he prayed that they might be loosed from the bondage of their sinful state, and be made partakers of Christ's holiness.

Thus ended this striking scene, which St. Luke has so graphically recorded for the instruction of the Church in all ages. Festus died when he had been Governor of Judæa for about two years. Agrippa and

Bernice lived out their brief day of ambition, worldliness or intrigue, and their names are only remembered in connexion with the Jewish outcast, to whose story of Jesus as the Messiah, fulfilling all prophecy, they had listened so incredulously. The proud city of Cæsarea has become "ruins of ruins;" but the words of the prisoner Paul are still words of power, and will be so while the Church of Christ endures; for of no man who ever lived may it be said more truly that "he being dead yet speaketh;" and in his history we find an illustration of the warning and the promise: "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but whoso doeth the will of God endureth for ever."

NOTES—LESSON XI.

1. *Herod Agrippa II.* was never king of Judæa; much less did he rule over the wider dominions of his father Herod Agrippa I. When the latter died at Cæsarea, A.D. 44 (Acts xii. 21-23), his son was considered too young to succeed him; but in A.D. 50 the Emperor Claudius made him king of Chalcis;¹ and in a few years the tetrarchies of Trachonitis and Abilene were likewise given to him. He possessed a thorough knowledge of Jewish law; and when Paul was brought before him he was superintendent of the Temple, and had the power of appointing the high priest. The Jews disliked him for his friendship with the Romans, whose favour he sedulously cultivated. He took part with the Romans in the final struggle between them and the Jews, and died A.D. 99, aged 70.

2. *Bernice*, the sister of Herod Agrippa II. and of Drusilla the wife of Felix, married Polemo II., king of a portion of Cilicia. She was a beautiful but profligate princess, and she was finally associated with Titus, the destroyer of Jerusalem.

¹ A principality at the foot of Anti-libanus.

LESSON XII.

ST. PAUL'S VOYAGE FROM CÆSAREA TO ROME—THE STORM
—ST. PAUL'S VISION—THE SHIPWRECK—ST. PAUL AT
ROME—CONCLUSION. (xxvii. xxviii.)

ST. Luke's account of the voyage and shipwreck of St. Paul, is so simple and natural, and yet so accurate and circumstantial—exhibiting such a remarkable acquaintance with the seafaring terms of his times and such a true appreciation of every aspect of a sailor's life—that, while it pleases the child and attracts the general reader, it is studied by nautical men with a true professional interest.*

In our own day, when magnificently appointed steam vessels convey passengers, with the utmost speed and comfort, between ports separated by half the circumference of the globe, such a voyage as that of St. Paul's from Cæsarea to Rome would be regarded merely as a few days' pleasant sailing; but it was very different in the days of the Apostle. In those remote times kings and emperors, and other great personages, were fain to betake themselves to the only means of sea-transport then open to travellers, of whatever

* As an interesting case in point, we are told that Nelson read the 27th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles on the eve of the Battle of Copenhagen.—DEAN HOWSON.

rank; and this was the merchant ship. And when we consider the ancient merchantman with its two paddle-rudders, its single mast, enormous yard, and clumsy build,—its commander ignorant of the use of the compass, and destitute of aids at all to be compared to our modern charts and instruments of navigation,—we shall see how greatly it differed from the finely proportioned clipper-ship, that now bears the manufactures of this country to distant lands, and brings their produce to our own shores.

The Jewish historian tells us that the men who composed the garrison of Cæsarea were mostly natives of Syria; but the "Augustan cohort" consisted, it would seem, of Roman soldiers. It was to Julius, a centurion of this "Augustus' band," that Paul and certain other prisoners were delivered, and his "fellow-labourer," as well as "fellow-prisoner," Aristarchus of Thessalonica, accompanied him.¹ And St. Luke tells us how, on a certain day, they embarked in "a ship of Adramyttium,"—a coasting vessel trading it would seem to the ports on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. On leaving Sidon the next day, the wind was unfavourable to a ship sailing to the western "coasts of Asia," and so, instead of running its direct course to the south of Cyprus, the vessel kept to the north, making its way between that island and the mainland, so as to fall in with the strong current that sets in from east to west along the southern coasts of Asia Minor, which, together with the smoother water and land wind, would enable them to work to windward as far as the Lycian port of Myra.

¹ Mentioned before, xix. 29; see also Col. iv. 10; Philem. 24.

Here the centurion transferred his prisoners and their guard to a corn-ship of Alexandria, bound for Italy. Leaving Myra, with a baffling wind still blowing from the west or north-west, they sailed with difficulty towards Cnidus, at the extreme south-west corner of Asia Minor, intending probably to pass the winter in its commodious harbour. The wind, however, not suffering them to enter it, nor to go their direct course, they ran down under the lee of Crete,¹ and sought refuge in the harbour of Fair Havens on its southern shore. Here they might have wintered in safety;² but, contrary to Paul's earnest counsel and warning (xxvii. 10), it was determined to make for the more convenient harbour of Phœnicæ. "And when the south wind blew softly, they thought they had obtained their purpose;" but suddenly a terrific north-easter³ swept down upon them from the mountains on the coast. Unable to face the wind, they ran before the gale in a southerly direction, and straight towards the quicksands of the Syrtis.⁴ To escape these was now their aim; and a temporary lull, under shelter of the little island of Claudia, allowed them to prepare the vessel for riding out the gale. By lowering the great yard and foresail, and hoisting a small storm-sail in its place,⁵

¹ The modern Candia.

² With the ancients navigation was suspended from Michaelmas to Lady Day, or, more strictly speaking, from the 9th of November till the 8th of March. The fast (xxvii. 9) or Day of Atonement occurred about Michaelmas or the beginning of October.

³ Euroclydon, or Eurakylon.

⁴ A dangerous bay full of shoals on the African coast between Tunis and Tripoli.

⁵ This would be absolutely necessary to steady the ship, and to keep her head as much to the wind as possible. Otherwise she would drift upon the quicksands of the African coast.

as well as by passing several turns of a rope round the middle of the ship's hull, "undergirding" her to increase her strength (ver. 17),—this object was accomplished. Thus they drifted westward before the storm; but hope became less and less, as the horrors of their situation increased. The tempest became more violent, and the ship began apparently to fill with water, for they had to lighten her; and "when neither sun nor stars for many days appeared," they gave up every hope of being saved. In the midst of all, Paul would doubtless rest upon his Lord's promise (xxiii. 11); but how cheering was its renewal at such a time—"Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Cæsar." Nor was this all. His prayers for the safety of his fellow-passengers were answered by the assurance—"And, lo, God hath given thee all who sail with thee" (xxvii. 24). And St. Luke tells us how, when the hearts of all men were failing them for fear, the Apostle "stood forth in the midst of them," declaring God's message.

Nevertheless, there was still no abatement of the storm; and when for fourteen days and nights they had been "driven up and down in Adria,"¹ the roar of breakers warned them of the vicinity of rocks; then in haste, lest they should be dashed upon them, they cast out four anchors from the stern, and waited anxiously for day.

The wisdom and influence of Paul were now paramount. He penetrated the design of the sailors to escape (ver. 30), and was the means of keeping them where their assistance was indispensable (vv. 31, 32), and at his "persuasion," food was partaken of by all on

¹ *i.e.* the Adriatic; which then included the whole of the sea between Greece, Italy and Africa.

board, who otherwise, exhausted by long abstinence and toil, would have failed in the crisis before them.

To run the ship upon the land was now their object. So, lightening her by throwing out the cargo, cutting away the anchors, adjusting the rudders,¹ and hoisting the foresail, they steered towards the sandy or pebbly beach² they saw before them. On this the vessel grounded; the bow becoming fixed, while the stern, being still in deep water, was broken by the dashing of the surf.

The cruel counsel of the soldiers (which Roman law would however have sanctioned³) was rejected by the centurion out of consideration to Paul; and he ordered all to save themselves as best they could, whether by swimming or by floating on spars and timbers of the wreck. So all were saved according to Christ's promise; for, of the two hundred and seventy-six souls on board the vessel, not a single person perished.

The island on which St. Paul and his fellow-voyagers were thrown, was the island of Malta (anciently called Melita), as is now satisfactorily proved. (See Note 1.) St. Paul's apostolic gifts soon raised him to honour among the islanders, whose hospitality he repaid by healing their sick; so that, when he and his companions left the island, after a stay of three months, they loaded them with presents.

It was in the spring of the year (A.D. 61), in the ship

¹ "Loosed the rudder-bands" (ver. 40). It has been supposed that when the anchors were cast out it was necessary to haul up the rudders and make them fast by lashings or "bands,"—these were now loosed in order to steer the ship.

² Which the word translated "shore" implies.

³ A Roman soldier paid the forfeit of his own life for the loss of a prisoner committed to his safe keeping.

"Castor and Pollux," an Alexandrian corn-ship, that the Apostle and his companions continued their voyage to Rome, touching first at Syracuse (the capital of Sicily), and, from thence, they "fetched a compass"¹ to Rhegium (now Reggio), a town on the south-west point of Italy. After waiting there one day (probably for a favourable wind), the ship ran then direct to Puteoli (the modern Pozzuoli), in the Bay of Naples, and only seven miles from the city of that name. The road to Rome then lay along the famous Appian Way. At Appii Forum (or the market-place of Appius, a station about forty-three miles from Rome), and again at the Three Taverns (a place of entertainment of a better class, about ten miles nearer to Rome), Paul was cheered by Christian brethren, who had walked out from the city to meet him; and he found their sympathy so welcome, that he "thanked God, and took courage."

At Rome, Julius would hand his prisoner over to the prefect of the Prætorian Guard, whom we know to have been Burrus. St. Paul's imprisonment appears to have been made as easy as possible. He was allowed to live in his own lodging, and his friends were permitted to visit him; though the inexorable chain, binding him to the ever-present Roman soldier, would remind him that he was yet a prisoner.

Still appealing to the Jews first, he "expounded and testified to them the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus;" proving both from Moses and from the prophets that He was the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel. But to his sorrow the

¹ *i.e.* "Fetching a compass" signifies going round; and this means, probably, tacking about or running a zigzag course on account of an unfavourable wind.

same obstinate spirit of unbelief, that was general with his countrymen throughout the world, produced the same result here as elsewhere. A few only believed ; and it was in the establishment and building up of a great Gentile Church, that the Apostle of the Gentiles found his true work at Rome.

At this point St. Luke's narrative ends abruptly. He only further tells us that Paul dwelt two whole years in his own house, "preaching the Kingdom of God," and redemption by Christ to all who came to him. (See Note 2.)

In St. Luke's record of the Apostolic Acts, we have seen the triumphant progress of the Church, from Jerusalem to Rome ; and how the few worshippers in the upper chamber became a "great multitude," who filled, not only their own land, but the whole world with their doctrine. We have seen the Apostles, commissioned by Christ, and endued with power by the Holy Ghost, not only preaching the good news of redemption, but setting up the Kingdom of God upon earth—a divinely instituted, organized and visible society, inspired by Christ's Spirit, and having the promise of His perpetual presence. We have seen this Church meeting in solemn council, driving away false doctrine, and preserving its unity as the Body of Christ. And when an age of inquiry and speculation succeeded to the apostolic times of enthusiastic and unquestioning faith, history tells us that the Church met from time to time, while yet its unity was preserved, to define as well as to defend the Catholic faith ; and so this faith was fixed in the creeds, which the Church still teaches as summaries of apostolic and Scripture doctrine.

And if, even in the days of the Apostles, heresies corrupted the simplicity of the faith, and false teachers were ever striving to impose a yoke of bondage, while party leaders—followers of Paul or Apollos or Cephas,—sought to break up the Church into sects, we need not be surprised, and we need not despair, at seeing the same things repeated in our own day. The Church is still “a visible presence in the face of the world;” and though some branches of it may be withered and corrupt, yet the sound part of it is still growing, and bringing forth fruit to the glory of God; and Christ’s promise is still abundantly fulfilled, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

NOTES—LESSON XII.

1. “*The island on which St. Paul and his fellow-voyagers were thrown.*” Two islands, anciently called Melita, viz.: the well-known Malta in the Mediterranean, and Meleda in the Gulf of Venice, have both claimed to be the scene of St. Paul’s shipwreck. The first of these is now satisfactorily proved to be the Melita of the Acts. (1) A vessel at Clauda bearing up against an east-north-east wind would be in the direct course for Malta, distant 476 miles; and this it is reckoned is just about the number of miles a ship (under the circumstances described in the text, xvii. 14-17) would drift in thirteen days, the time occupied by the Castor and Pollux on its voyage from Clauda to Melita, one day having been taken up by its run from Fair Havens to Clauda. (2) Malta agrees with St. Luke’s description of the scene of the shipwreck, while the soundings, the rocky shore and sandy beach, and the place where two seas met, all go to prove its identity; and, if any additional proof were wanting, it would

be found in the fact of an Alexandrian ship calling at the island on its voyage to Puteoli (xxviii. 11), and also from its course from thence (vv. 12, 13).—SMITH'S *Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*; HUMPHRY.

2. Supposed facts of St. Paul's life from his arrival at Rome in the spring of A.D. 61 until his martyrdom in the summer of A.D. 68.

St. Paul's trial was probably delayed by the absence of his accusers; and after their arrival more time may have been granted them for procuring their witnesses from different parts of the Empire. His trial, which ended in acquittal, is believed to have terminated in the spring of A.D. 63. During his imprisonment he wrote the several epistles—to Philemon, to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Clement asserts, that St. Paul, on his liberation, preached the Gospel in the East and West, "even in the extremity of the West;" which expression would denote Spain, and, according to the general testimony of the primitive Church, he visited that country. He is also thought to have gone again into Macedonia, and there to have written his first Epistle to Timothy, and the Epistle to Titus subsequently at Ephesus. At Miletus he left Trophimus sick (2 Tim. iv. 20), and in the spring of A.D. 68 he appears to have been again a prisoner at Rome. Bishop Wordsworth supposes that his enemies, the idolaters of Ephesus, accused him to the Roman authorities during Nero's persecution; and that he was arrested and taken to Rome. Here, during a rigorous imprisonment, he wrote his second Epistle to Timothy, and finally suffered martyrdom by being beheaded outside the city walls: probably in the May or June of A.D. 68.

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